

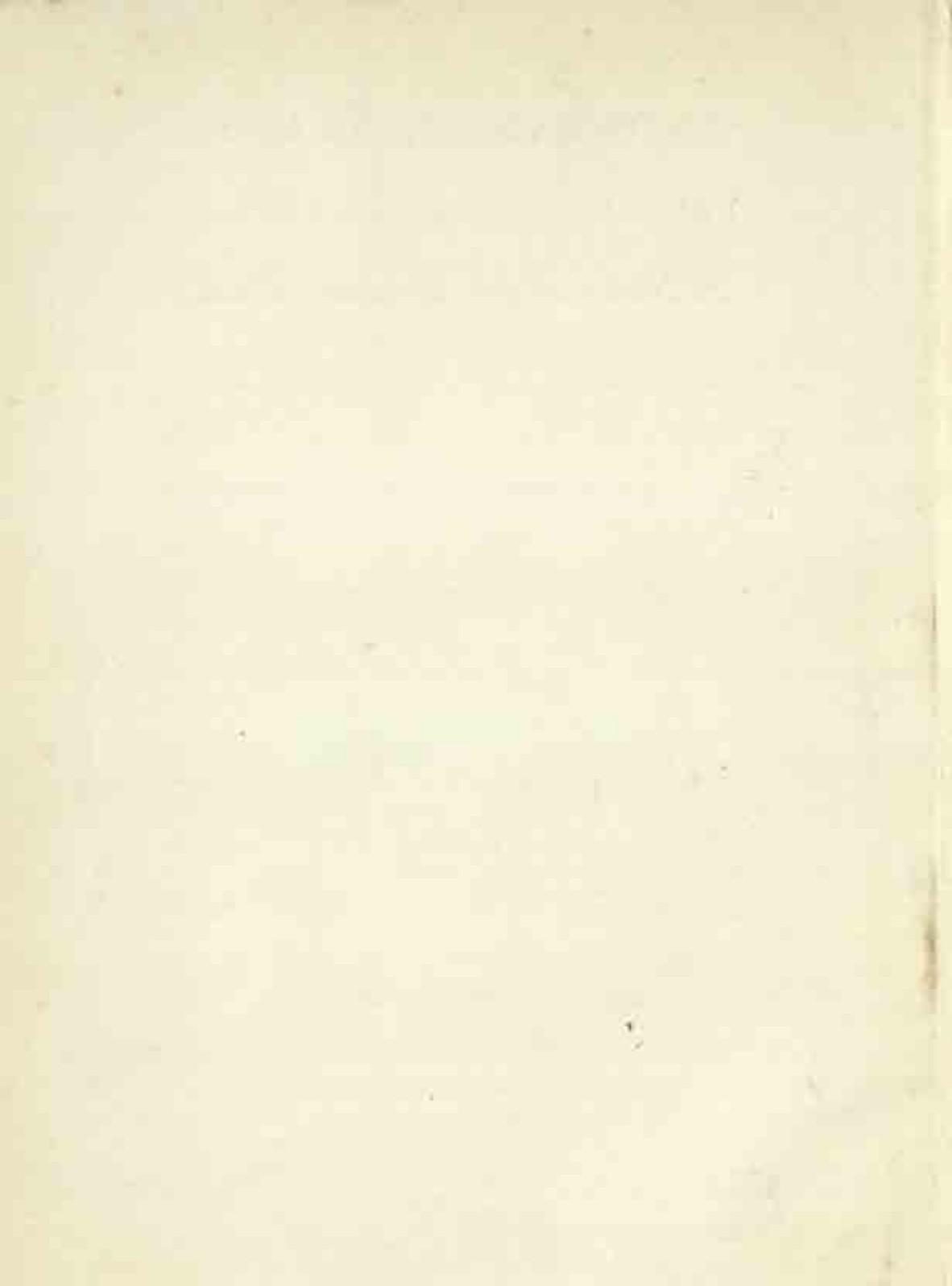
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THE BURIED PEOPLE



SIBYLLE VON CLES-REDEN
THE BURIED PEOPLE
A Study of the Etruscan World

Translated from the German by C. M. Woodhouse

With 81 illustrations in photogravure

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RUPERT HART-DAVIS

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ERRATA

- Page 14, line 28: *for Maggi read Magi*
Page 43, line 27: *for thousands of read a thousand*
Page 48, line 24: *for house read housed*
Page 68, last line: *for Etruscan read Tuscan*
Page 69, line 22: *for Huge birds of prey with their wings read His large wings of a bird of prey*
Page 79, line 31: *for pictorial read artistic*
Page 100, line 6: *for Campagna (Campania) read Campania*
Page 100, line 7: *for this territory read Latium*
Page 151, transpose Plate 34 from lines 7 and 8 to end of line 4
Page 160, line 16: *for is still read was*
Page 171, line 52: *for also built a similar read built this*
Page 178, lines 3 and 7: *for Grotto read Grotte*
Page 179, line 16: *for Grotto read Grotte*
Page 179, line 28: *for tombs read sarcophagi*
Page 180, line 4: *for Grotto read Grotte*
Page 185, line 31: *for king read emperor*
Page 190, line 2: *for Potigliano read Pitigliano*
Page 191, line 18: *for over a read several*
Page 213, line 14: *for today there read perhaps there*
Page 216, line 17: *for the houses of the dead read all human habitations*

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MAP

Central and Northern Italy drawn by K. C. Jordan

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Note: Drawings 1, 2, 6, 7 & 10 are from Ducati's *Storia dell' Arte Etrusca*.

PREFACE

THE idea of making the Etruscan world the theme of a book arose out of my first direct contact with it, which was my experience of the city of the dead at Caere. There the gigantic funeral mounds with the magnificent habitations of the dead in their wombs, and the silent streets marked by the ruts of wheels thousands of years ago, and the enigmatic smiles of the stone and terracotta portraits of the dead Etruscans on their sarcophagi, and the whole of this strange fragment of primeval Asia in the midst of a European landscape, gripped me so deeply and irresistibly that my studies of the Etruscan problem may be said to have begun from that moment.

In the course of years of study at Rome and frequent travels through the territory once settled by the Etruscans, I have tried to build up that first impression and to complete a rounded picture. This book is the result. Starting from personal experience, rather than from critical research or records, my intention has been to transmit to a wide circle of readers something of the opulence and the magic of the Etruscan world, which has perhaps been too much overshadowed by the glory of Greece and Rome. The one-sided emphasis on Greco-Roman elements in European civilisation is no doubt justified, but perhaps it may nevertheless be useful to take a glance into the darkness at the opposite pole of the Greco-Roman world and to study the pre-hellenic cultures of the Mediterranean world, rooted in the ancient earth-cults, of which the Etruscans were in a sense the last representatives. Today it is gradually coming to be recognised again how many strands of European civilisation have their roots deep down in Etruscan soil, and how important a role was played in Western development by the Etruscan people, whom the Romans so mercilessly destroyed.

So far as this book touches on theory, it makes no pretension to support one or another among the numerous theories on the controversial question of Etruscan origins or to establish new theories in the field of archaeology or cultural history. It seeks only to give a bird's-eye view of the present position of Etruscology, and it is limited essentially to indicating the various theories and opinions of professional scholars. The material adduced in evidence of the continuity of Etruscan customs and religious ideas and artistic trends in the people's daily life, and in mediaeval church art, was practically entirely collected by personal observation during my travels through ancient Etruria. Some of the Etruscan works of art here presented in photographs have never previously been published.

In order to restrict my subject-matter to reasonable proportions, the book is confined to the portrayal of the true heart-land of Etruria together with the most important sites in it. It is in these that the character and culture of the Etruscans have left behind their deepest and most permanent traces, whereas in the areas of later colonial occupation the Etruscan influence did not succeed in modifying the habits of the population and the character of their settlements sufficiently fundamentally to leave behind a living undercurrent that can still be felt today, as it can in central Etruria and the Tuscan coastal area.

Finally I should like to thank my collaborator, Dr. Eugen Hass, the photographer, and his wife, as well as the other photographers who have contributed to illustrate this volume, for the fruitful work they have done in museums and collections.

I feel myself under a great debt of gratitude to all those who gave me guidance, encouragement and help in the researches and preparations for my book, especially to Dr. Filippo Maggi, Deputy Director of the collection of antiquities in the Vatican, to whom I am also particularly grateful for his valuable support in procuring the illustrative material; to my respected professor, Ludwig Curtius; and to my dear friend, Dr. T. H. Fokker, to whose encouragement in the field of art-history my book is greatly indebted.

SIBYLLE VON CLES-REDEN

THE BURIED PEOPLE

of the earlier custom of burial, which had been universal, by that of cremation. The *terramare* are so obviously reminiscent of the villages on piles built by the prehistoric populations of the Alpine lake district that it is tempting to assume an immigration of the latter into Italy. But linguistic research has tended rather to show, on the contrary, that the Indo-European invasion took place not from north to south, but from east to west, in three successive waves. As a result the question remains very obscure.

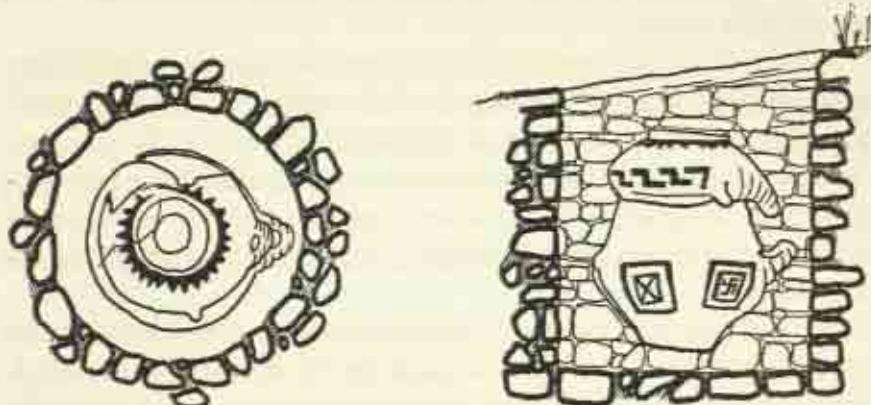
The Illyrians, who were part of the Indo-European immigration, certainly came from the Balkans. They settled in Venezia, where they were later to form a distinct ethnic group.

None of these new arrivals, however, was destined to rouse Italy from the long slumber of prehistoric time. Many centuries were still to pass before the immense time-lag of the West behind the East was to be caught up.

Towards the year 1200 B.C., the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin was convulsed to its foundations by the tidal wave of the Aegean invasion. This was a westward movement of the Indo-European peoples and the inhabitants of Asia Minor, at the same time as the invasion of mainland Greece by the Dorians. Syria, Crete, Asia Minor and the Aegean Islands were all devastated; the Hittite empire collapsed, and even Egypt was threatened. The brilliant ancient civilisation of Crete and Mycenae went down in a welter of blood and flame. The heroic record of the Achaeans' onslaught on Asia Minor is enshrined in such memories from the past, and presages of the future, as echoed through the songs of Homer at the cradle of hellenism.

Four centuries were to pass before the emergence of a new civilisation based on these ruins—the Greek civilisation properly so called. Not till then did these peoples find a new equilibrium to replace the traditional world from which they had been so brutally uprooted. Despite the lack of positive evidence, it can reasonably be accepted that new elements found their way into Italy from the Balkans at this date. But it is only on the threshold of the first millennium that a

precisely defined type that can be called "Italian" first begins to appear; and at the same date there began the first evolution of the necessities of a civilised life, which were hitherto unknown. The cylindrical vase of primitive workmanship, which had served for centuries as a receptacle of the ashes of the dead, became transformed into an urn in the shape of a double cone, which was less crude and better propor-



1. *Urns of the Villanova people*

tioned in design. The decoration of pottery, though still confined to geometric patterns of simple design (such as undulating lines and swastikas), begins to show evidence of a more inventive imagination, as well as more care in execution. In certain areas, including Latium and what was later to become Etruria, the cinerary urn took on the form of a house; it preserves the appearance of the primitive Italian hut, which was generally a circular construction. In the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., vases in the shape of animals are found among domestic utensils; and together with certain new designs which illustrate a more advanced technique in ornamental bronze-work, these vases may be taken as evidence of Aegean influence.

The one great advance by which this period is marked, however, is in the use of iron, which went hand in hand with a rapid development in the working of other metals. The art of laminating metal had

long been known in the East; and it now became increasingly common in Italy, along with that of hammering bronze-leaf. Confronted by the new, more powerful offensive weapons of iron, the old-fashioned leather jerkin proved inadequate, and the Italian soldier adopted the bronze cuirass and the round shield. His equipment was completed by a pointed helmet with curved plume. After his death, this helmet was placed on top of the urn of terracotta or bronze which contained his ashes.

The characteristic features of this civilisation, known as the "Villanova culture" after the principal sites of excavation, were spread fairly rapidly over the whole of the peninsula. The one point on which archaeologists have not yet agreed is, were the Villanova people descendants of the inhabitants of the *terramare*, or did they belong to a new wave of invaders? The fact that, in almost all Etruscan sites of any importance so far excavated, the Villanova people seem to have preceded the Etruscans has led some scholars to argue that they were one and the same people. Philological evidence, on the other hand, seems to indicate that the Villanova people were of Indo-European stock, which the Etruscans were not. Although they introduced a certain number of innovations to the Italian peninsula, it was not the Villanova people who first brought Italy onto the stage of history; and ancient tradition does not even record their name. If we know practically nothing of the life of these barbarian tribes, we know hardly any more about that of their successors, the Etruscans. It is true that we know what part of Italy was first touched by civilisation; but we can form no more than an imperfect idea of the people who were responsible for this tremendous achievement.

Chapter Two

THE ETRUSCAN MYSTERY

FROM the Ligurian Alps down to the mouth of the Tiber, the sea washes a coastline broken by deep indentations. These are the shores on which the Etruscan empire was born. The melancholy red tufa-rock of the mountains lapped by these waves might be a petrified reflection of the subterranean inferno itself; and out of the metallic richness of the soil burst jets of vapour and hot springs. Here is the soil from which the settlers on the sea-lapped cliffs extracted their copper and iron—the latter a symbol of the coming of a new age, and soon to become a magnet to attract ships from other lands. Next came the precious products of distant countries, Egypt and the East, to be unloaded on these shores. Soon they created a craving for wealth among the new inhabitants of the Italian coast; and they brought with them too the revelation of an aesthetic revolution, as well as the taste for power.

Who then were the people we now find established on these shores who seem to have taken the place of the Villanova people? We know that later on the Romans called them Etruscans; to the Greeks they were the Tyrrhenians; their own name for themselves was *Rasenna*. The question of their origin, however, is still a matter of endless debate. The science of archaeology has disposed of the old theory that they came from the Alps, leaving two possible solutions in opposition to each other: either the Etruscans were indigenous; or they came from Asia Minor. There are many arguments in favour of the second theory, not the least of which lies in the explanation given by the Tyrrhenians themselves of their own origin.

A number of legends, which possibly go back to their Aegean past on the coast of Asia Minor, tell of heroes of royal descent who crossed the sea to found a new home for themselves on Italian soil. This national tradition of the Etruscans can be detected in the writings of Herodotus:

In the days of Atys the son of Manes there was a great famine all over Lydia. . . . As this disaster did not abate but became even more severe . . . the king divided the whole population into two parts, and drew lots between them, one half to remain there and the other to go abroad under the leadership of his son Tyrhenos. . . . After sailing past many countries they arrived in Umbria, where they established towns which they still inhabit. But they changed their name from *Lydians* to a name taken from that of the king's son who had led them, and after him they called themselves *Tyrrhenians*. . . .

In the second half of the eighth century B.C., the Etruscans suddenly emerge from the shadows of prehistory in which the peoples of Italy lay submerged. The slow evolution of centuries abruptly gives place to a dynamic force which sweeps them along at an almost dizzy speed.

The Etruscans seem to have set out to absorb in a few decades what other peoples had taken thousands of years to acquire. The little coastal towns established to the west of the mouth of the Tiber suddenly underwent an astonishing development. A new cult of the dead was adopted by the inhabitants of the Tyrrhenian coast, and from that date onwards a series of magnificent tombs begins to appear as landmarks of their lightning advance towards civilisation. From the maritime cities of the Etruscans sprang a civilisation which fused Tuscany, Latium and Umbria in the crucible of a common religious and cultural system. The confederation of these cities can be regarded as a precursor, many centuries in advance, of that unification which Rome later imposed on the peninsula.

Between the eighth and fifth centuries B.C., the new kingdom seems to have revived the splendours of the civilisation of Crete,

Mycenae and the Aegean. There are even cyclopean walls, which might be replicas of the ramparts that protected the castles of Mycenaean princes, surrounding the Etruscan settlements built on their hills of red tufa-stone. Vast networks of canals were constructed to drain the marshy ground of the coast and to transform it into fertile soil.

Of the coastal cities beside the Tyrrhenian Sea, which has been so called ever since the days of the Etruscans, the most important are the following: Caere (in Etruscan, *Chaire* or *Chisra*); Tarquinia (*Tar-cunia*); Vulci (*Velchba*); Vetulonia (*Vatluna*); Rusellae; Populonia (*Pupluna*); and Volterra (*Velathri*).

From the archaic period onwards, the Etruscans proved themselves to be first-class sailors. In the seventh century B.C. they even disputed the control of the Mediterranean with the Phoenicians and Greeks. Commercial transactions brought to Etruria a great quantity of articles of ordinary everyday use, as well as jewellery made of ivory, gold, silver and bronze; and these products of oriental craftsmanship and taste must have stimulated competition, not without success. Designs succeeded each other in great variety: fabulous creatures, followed by naturalistic representations of plants and animals of Aegean provenance, provided in turn the inspiration of native artists and replaced the old-fashioned geometric decoration of the Villanova period: hence the application of the term "orientalising" to the first period of Etruscan art. Tyrrhenian goldsmiths showed a notable talent, and acquired great skill in working bronze and precious metals, as witness the fact that their products were in demand even in Greece.

There is in fact concrete evidence of a cultural advance in every sphere, which took them far beyond the Villanova level. It can most naturally be explained by contacts maintained with more advanced civilisations, as a direct result of expanding commerce and growing wealth. Such evidence cannot by itself be taken as sufficient to prove the immigration of a foreign people. The customs and the habits of Etruscans seem to set them sharply apart from other Italian peoples in

many respects; but this separation is particularly marked in two of the more important spheres, which are those of language and religion.

There are certain customs, such as that of divination from the intestines (which was borrowed from the Mesopotamians and Hittites of Asia Minor) and interpretation of natural phenomena, which were of the essence of Etruscan religion but were quite unknown to the ancient inhabitants of the peninsula. The same is true of the cult of the dead which played such a part in Etruscan life, in sharp contrast with the very simple funeral rites practised by the Villanova people.¹ Their huge tombs in the form of tumuli (a shape recalling that of the tombs of Asia Minor) are contemporaneous in date of construction with the development of the coastal towns; and they are evidence of a change in religious ideas and practices so revolutionary that it hardly seems explicable except on the assumption of the arrival in the peninsula of a new race, which must previously have had contact with more highly developed ancient civilisations.

But numerous though the indications are that point to an affinity between the Etruscan culture and the civilisations of the Aegean and Asia Minor, archaeology has been unable to find in Lydia, which the Tyrrhenians themselves regarded as their country of origin, any confirmation of the tradition recorded by Herodotus. There is not the slightest trace of any such emigration in Lydian legend; and Lydian inscriptions excavated at Sardis reveal no linguistic connection with Etruscan inscriptions. It is true that the texts of Lydian epigraphy belong to a relatively recent date, later than the sixth century B.C. and certainly much later than the presumed departure of the Tyrrhenians (as they were later to be called). There is a long gap of silence in the record of Lydian history, as there is generally in Asia Minor from approximately the eleventh to the eighth centuries: that is to say, throughout the centuries which separate the legendary from the historical age. It is during this period that the missing events must have taken place.

¹ The Indo-European custom of cremation had never entirely supplanted that of inhumation, which continued to be practised concurrently on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Herodotus mentions the existence of a Lydian royal family, the Maionians, belonging to a date much earlier than that at which he wrote; and Lydian legend speaks of another dynasty, the Atyades, who preceded the Heraclides: beyond that, tradition is silent. Even Xanthus, the Lydian historian, is only able to cite the names of the last five kings of the Heraclid dynasty. The explanation is clear: in 538 B.C. the Persians occupied Lydia and obliterated almost all traces of the past. It is certain, however, that there once existed in Lydia (or Mysia) a town named Tyrrha or Tyrsa, though its location is unknown; and also that there was a Lydian god called Tarku (no doubt the same as the Etruscan god Tarchon). There are, moreover, very early traces in the records of other peoples of the presence of the Tyrrhenians in the Mediterranean basin, known also under the name of Tyrseni or Tursa (which was probably the origin of the name Tusci, an alternative designation used by the Romans for the Etruscans). An Egyptian inscription of the thirteenth century B.C. speaks of the "Tursa of the sea" as mercenaries in the service of the King of the Libyans, whose army invaded Egypt in 1220 B.C. and was beaten by the troops of the Pharaoh Merenptah. Thucydides, on the other hand, reports the Tyrseni (whom he calls "wanderers of the sea") as having at one time settled on the islands of Lemnos and Lesbos.

On Lesbos there has in fact been found a funerary *stele* (tomb-stone) bearing two inscriptions in a language very close to Etruscan. More recently an Italian archaeological expedition, under the direction of Professor Filippo Maggi, made a number of discoveries on Lemnos which seem to confirm the theory that the island was inhabited by Tyrrhenians. But the results of these latter excavations have not yet been submitted to scientific scrutiny, being still unpublished. Nor are modern scholars the only ones to have been interested in the problem of the Etruscans' origin: so long ago as the time of Augustus, the tradition of their origin in Lydia was contested by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who concluded that they were in fact indigenous to Italy.

Mysterious as the appearance of the Etruscans in Italy must remain, we know even less—almost nothing, indeed—of their history and their very way of life. Nothing survives of the kingdom of *Rasenna*, except hundreds and thousands of tombs. Yet, from the eighth to the fifth century B.C., they were a great power in occupation of the whole coastline of the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Greek city of Cumae was the sole independent enclave in the whole extent of the empire from Paestum in the south, including probably the whole valley of the Po to the Adriatic, and to the foot of the Alps in the north. It included the island of Elba with its valuable deposits of ferrous metals, as well as the eastern part of Corsica.

The Romans inherited the Etruscans' ambitious dream of an empire uniting the whole of Italy under a single power, and they realised the dream; but this did not prevent them from waging a ruthless war upon their former lords and masters. The fact was that there was no room in the peninsula for two rivals in imperialism. From the day when self-consciousness as a nation first dawned on the Romans, they were inexorably drawn into conflict with the people to whom they owed their civilisation. They had no alternative but to subject the dying race under their own protectorate, to destroy its very consciousness of its own individuality and independence, before they could feel themselves entirely free in the cultural sphere as well as in the political. From that date there was only one civilisation—their own; and it was their mission to defend and to extend it.

There followed an exhausting war fought by the Etruscans against their new enemy, which ended in disillusion and despair and the eclipse of their ancient pride; and then set in a progressive decline in the fortunes of the Tyrrhenian people, which seems almost of its own accord to have vanished from the map of history during the last few centuries before the birth of Christ. In the time of Augustus, the poet Propertius wrote in the course of a poem in honour of the Emperor, that in his reign "the ashes on the hearths of the Etruscans were scattered to the winds." The Etruscan language was already dis-

appearing; the art and religion of the Tyrrhenians were already absorbed into the art and religion of Rome.

A freak of fate has resulted in the loss of practically all the written evidence relating to the civilisation and history of the Etruscans; among others, the eight-volume work attributed to the Emperor Claudius, which must once have contained the most important of all documentary evidence. Not a single bilingual inscription or document has been discovered to make possible a definitive solution to the riddle of the Etruscan language. We can read the texts, and we know how the words were pronounced; but despite the recent efforts of Etruscology based on the comparative method, it is impossible to determine the sense of more than about 100 words, which is far too few to provide a basis for the serious study of the language.

The short funerary inscriptions, a great number of which have survived, almost invariably use exactly the same words. The longer texts were written on rolls of cloth which have not withstood the passage of time—with one single exception. This exception is a roll that was cut into strips and used to wrap round a mummy, and found at Agram. Philologists have devoted years to trying to decipher the 1,500 words of its text, but they have produced strikingly different results. On one point at least, however, they are unanimous: the language of the Etruscans, which was written in an archaic version of the Greek alphabet, belongs neither to the Indo-European nor to the Semitic group of languages. It is believed to have been a purely Mediterranean language, antedating the period of expansion of the Indo-European group, and surviving from an archaic linguistic era which probably embraced Greece and Crete as well. This language was already in process of disappearing at the beginning of the historical period. Traces of it remain in the pre-Indo-European names of families and places in Greece and Asia Minor, as well as in one surviving language of our own day, namely, Basque. But nothing is to be gained by turning to Basque to elucidate the meaning of Etruscan words.

So long as the Tyrrhenians' means of expression remains a dead

language for us, we shall never succeed in lifting the veil of mystery that separates us from the Etruscan world. The continual accumulation of archaeological discoveries has opened up more and more routes that ought to lead us to a fuller comprehension of the Etruscan character. But the tracks are confused, and our dazzled eyes remain still incapable of penetrating the true inner nature of this extraordinary civilisation.

Chapter Three

CAERE : CITY OF THE DEAD

BARELY twenty-five miles separate Caere from Rome. Yet it is as if one were at the beginning of an entirely different world, infinitely strange. The red volcanic soil of what was once the Tyrrhenian coastline still bears the indelible stamp of the Etruscan character branded on it. Nowhere else is the Etruscan mystery so inscrutable and oppressive, seemingly so near to a solution and yet so incomprehensible, as here in Caere: not so much in those parts of it which were once inhabited by the living Tyrrhenians, but in Caere's city of the dead—the necropolis which grew up like a ghostly twin beside the living town, and never stopped growing as the other died.

On a rocky ridge of red tufa-stone, which protrudes down to the bare seashore like a bastion of the wooded mountains, stood the ancient Chisra of the Etruscans, which the Romans later called Caere. A last echo of the name is still to be heard in that of the somnolent, dreamy village of Cerveteri, or *Caere Vetus*, whose crumbling mediaeval walls stand on the outer limits of what was once the Tyrrhenian township. As is the case with most Tyrrhenian settlements, a gorge separates it from a parallel ridge on which stands the city of the dead. But the wealthy, sophisticated town of Caere, where young Roman nobles used to be sent to acquire a veneer of culture and refinement, never occupied more than about seventy acres even in its most brilliant period; whereas the necropolis expanded insatiably over a thousand years. So the bright green plain by the sea gradually changed into a monstrous landscape of the dead, the appearance of which can still be detected today.

They were a strange people, the Etruscans. They generally built houses for their gods and their living out of wood or baked clay; but for their dead they carved stone mansions out of the rock, as though building them for eternity, as though only the dead were real in this world of illusion.

The mounds containing the Etruscan tombs, large and small, cover some 140 acres. They protrude above ground level like a gigantic silent city stretching from the sea to the hills; and the round summits of the hills seem like nothing so much as a magnified repetition of the same shapes on a larger scale. Where the necropolis of Caere ends, those of its harbours begin: Pyrgi, Alsium and Punicum. It seems almost incredible that this land still had room for the living, together with their fields and pastures.

Long before the dun-coloured rocky eyrie of Cerveteri becomes visible, the road is lined on the right by the tumuli of these Tyrrhenian sepulchral monuments. Many of them have been explored, but many more are still unopened. Only a small area of the necropolis of Caere—about six acres out of 140—has been systematically excavated and restored. (Plate 1.)

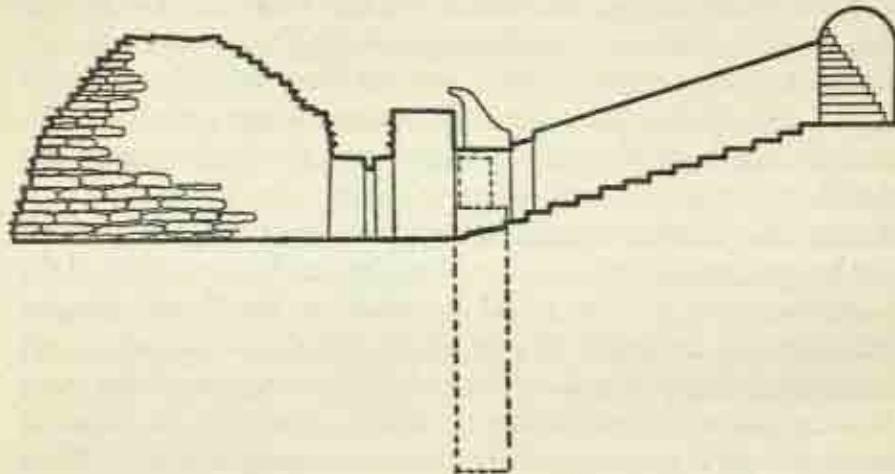
The ancient cemetery road, with its deeply indented tracks made by the two-wheeled wagons which once carried the splendid funeral processions of the Etruscans to the city of the dead, still leads into the home of long-forgotten shades, as it has done for thousands of years. In long rows stand the vast and silent mounds, rising to 130 feet in height. They are made of earth heaped up on drum-shaped bases, which are carved out of the solid tufa-stone: magnificent survivals from the eighth, seventh and sixth centuries B.C. At that date, when almost the whole of Italy was under Etruscan domination, the builders disdained to inscribe the names of those buried on the walls of their tombs, for it was unthinkable to them that their fame should ever come to be forgotten. (Plate 2.)

In the fifth century B.C. came a period of great political and economic crisis in the Tyrrhenian empire; and this was also a turning-point in the destiny of the wealthy maritime city of Caere. The loss of

Latium, which gained its independence, and of southern Etruria, which was conquered by the Samnites, reduced the importance of the great coastal capitals. In 378 B.C. Caere suffered another severe blow, when a Greek fleet from Sicily occupied and destroyed Pyrgi. The great period was now past, when Etruscans, Carthaginians and Greeks shared the maritime commerce of the Mediterranean on equal terms. Now the Etruscan sea-power was almost completely broken; and meanwhile hostility between Etruria and Rome had also broken out. Caere had always maintained good neighbourly relations with Rome, and kept aloof for some time yet from the fighting which blazed up with increasing bitterness between Rome and the individual city-states—all the more so since it was the Mediterranean Sea that she regarded as her real sphere of interest. But in the end Caere too was drawn into the fateful struggle between two worlds, and had lost her political independence to Rome at least by the middle of the fourth century B.C. Her actual annexation to the Roman Empire was then only a question of time. Although Caere escaped violent destruction, which was the price paid by the majority of the other Etruscan towns for their resistance to Rome, nevertheless the period of her prime was at an end and her importance steadily declined. With the downfall of the Tyrrhenian empire, the whole Etruscan coastal area, which had once been so fertile, began to fall derelict; malaria began to depopulate the countryside; and the result was to seal the doom of the former capital of Etruscan culture along with the rest.

The history of Caere can be clearly read in the shadow of its substance—in the City of the Dead. The oldest tombs in this necropolis date from the mists of the remotest past. We do not even yet know with certainty whether the people buried in the so-called "shaft-graves," where vessels containing the ashes of the dead have been found together with occasional objects from the early Iron Age, were of the same race as those buried uncremated in the shallow quadrangular pits of rather later date. One group of scholars is inclined to identify the uncremated bodies with those of the newly immigrated Etruscan people, and to regard the quadrangular pit (*fossa*) as the

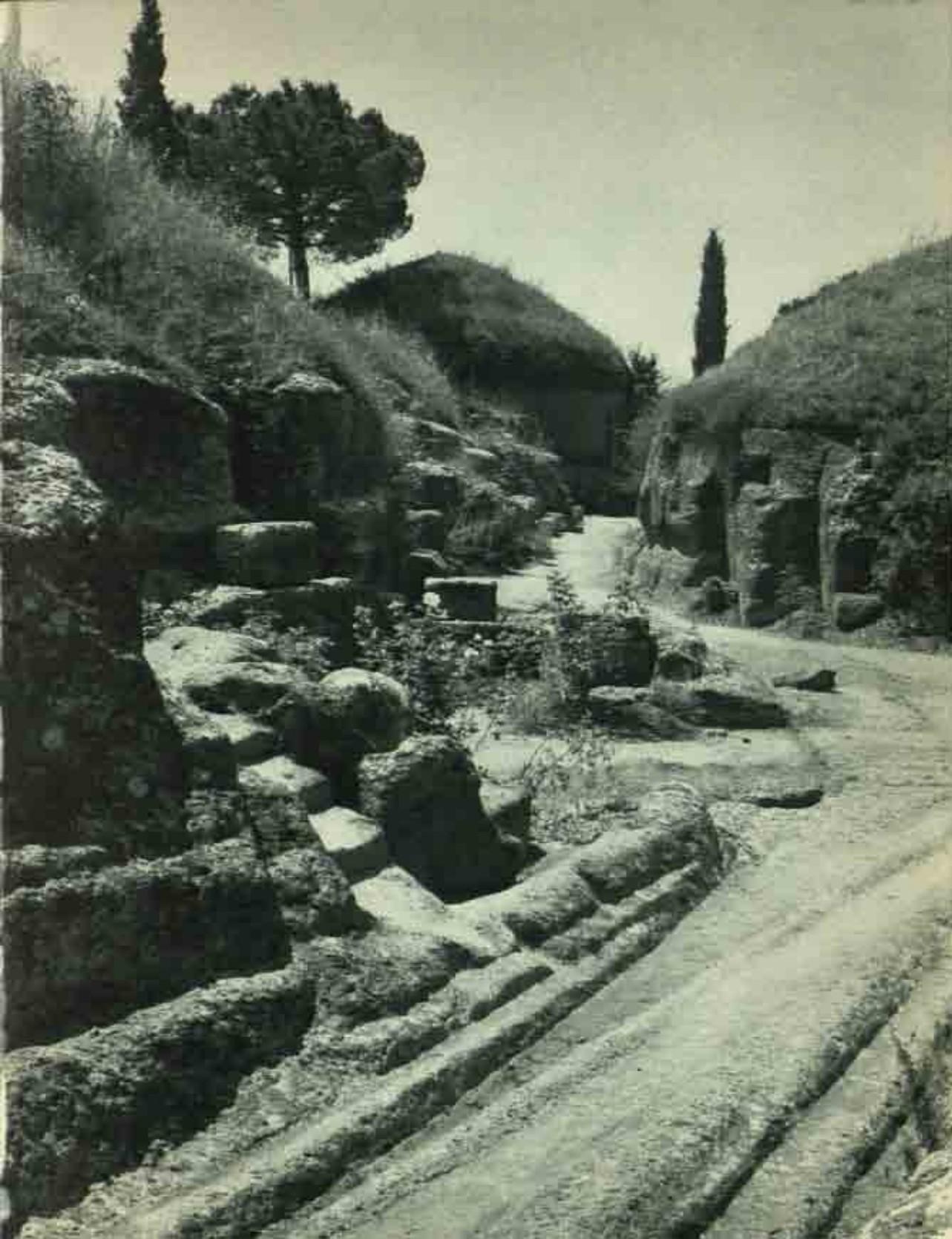
earliest form of the Etruscan chamber-tomb. Another group points to the fact that burial was the oldest original practice on the Tyrrhenian and Ligurian coast, and might well have been preserved as the custom of the original population alongside the practice of cremation in use among the later Indo-European immigrants. On this view, the practice of burial is consequently no evidence at all for the arrival of the Tyrrhenians.

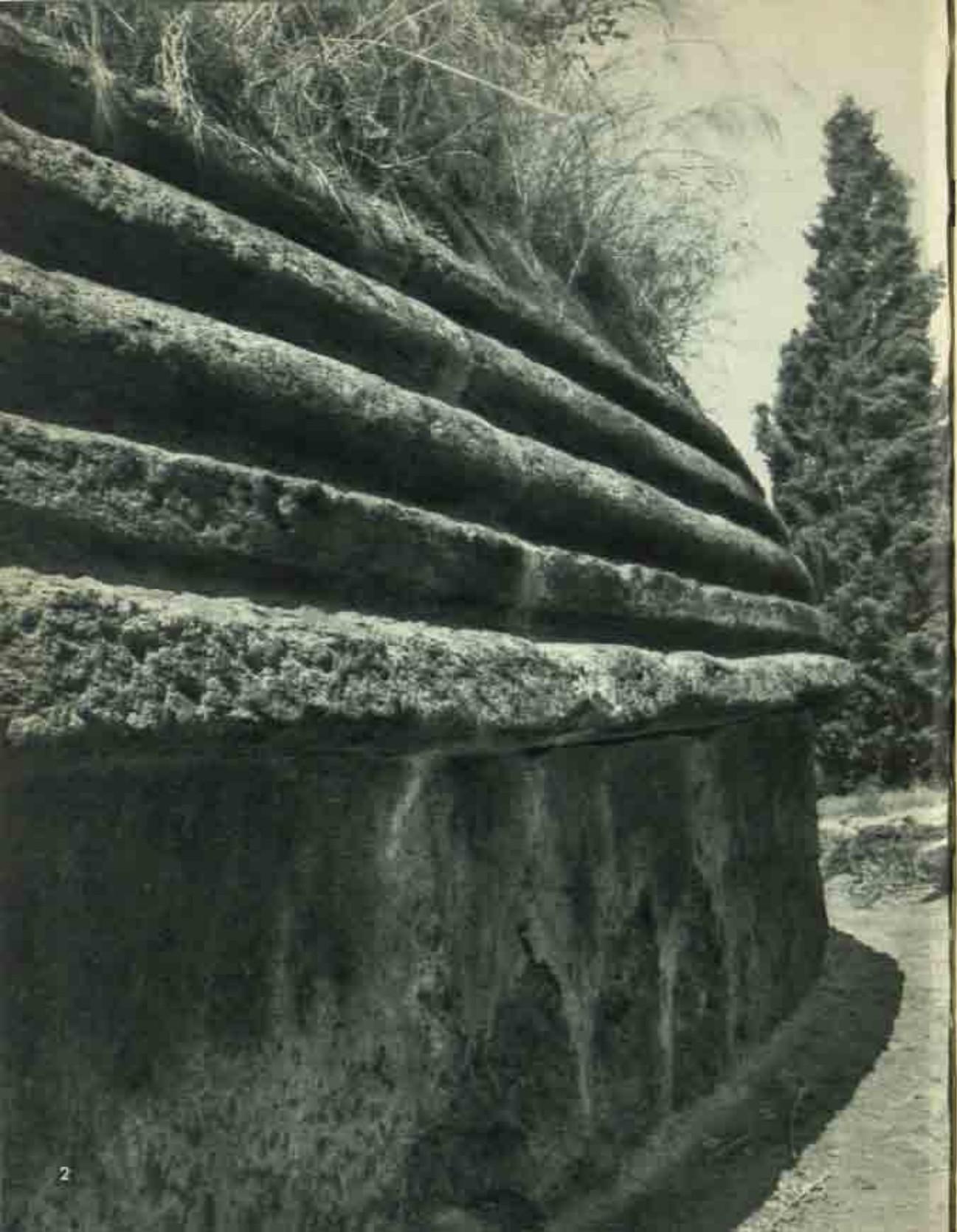


2. Section of a tomb

However, the huge mounds which alone can be confidently described as "Etruscan" first appear all over Etruria as isolated examples in each necropolis, where the older and simpler customs still continue for a long time alongside the new practice. These splendid monuments tower up like rare exotic formations, symbols of a new epoch in contrast to the simple graves of a past age.

Caere's zenith is reflected in the gigantic dimensions of the tombs of this epoch. Never more than twelve members of a single family found their last resting-place in these chambers, embedded deep in the tufa-stone foundations of the mounds. But later, when the star of Caere begins to wane, the monuments become gradually more modest. They give way gradually to chamber-tombs carved out at the





foot of the tumuli along the streets that intersect the necropolis. In the period of the Tyrrhenian nation's decline, there is a certain anxiety about the way the name and origins of the deceased are put on record, as though the Etruscans were already becoming uneasily aware how completely their race might be forgotten.

But the true aspect of Caere is not to be found in these melancholy graves of a defeated people, a dying epoch, their gloomy depths gleaming with stagnant water. It lies rather in the paintings of the dead which the mighty Etruscans produced at the date when, in Livy's words, they controlled Italy "from sea to sea." In the scale of these there can still be seen the extravagance of a nation intoxicated by its youthful strength. The thirty centuries through which their secret has endured still lie heavy on the land, like a magic spell. We know very little, indeed practically nothing, of that cult of the dead whose regulations imposed the round shape of the universe on these funeral mounds. But we can detect in them the passionate character of the life lived by the Etruscans in their archaic period, which led them to glorify death as the highest pinnacle of happiness. In this great period death was overshadowed by no regrets or fears for these bold seafarers, these dauntless conquerors, these epicures in love with beauty.

In the dark bosom of the red tufa-stone, under the rounded domes of the funeral mounds, their dead dwelt in habitations faithfully modelled on the homes of the living. The larger tumuli often housed several of them, each having their separate entrance in the form of a high, narrow slit, tapering at the top and leading down to a low doorway into the underground house.

Beyond the entrance to the habitation of the dead a larger ante-room opens out, followed by smaller rooms which connect with this *atrium* through openings shaped like doors or windows. Stone slabs line the walls, many of them in the shape of beds; and on them rested the embalmed bodies of the dead, as if asleep, hung with jewellery, exquisitely dressed, with laurel-wreaths of gold on their brows. There are also sometimes sarcophagi of earthenware, stone or wood standing

on pedestals. Sometimes the dead were laid out on the slabs with their beds, as witness the notches into which the legs of the beds were fitted. The smaller chambers were reserved for married couples in their last sleep, the wife on the left of her husband: her position is still indicated by a stone triangle, the sign of womanhood. The other members of the family generally rested in the ante-room. Only the children were left out of this community: their little bodies were buried outside, in the stone in front of the mounds, presumably because the Etruscans' faith did not permit them to share the other world of the grown-ups. In front of the entrance stood other crude stone symbols: a phallic column for the man, and for the woman again the triangle shaped like the pediment of a building, which could be interpreted either as a sexual symbol or as the sign of the house, the domain of the woman. The number and size of these symbols show the number and age of the dead in each particular tumulus. (Plate 3.)

The development of Etruscan domestic culture is reflected more clearly than anywhere else in the elaboration of Caere's tombs. The oldest type of dome-shaped tomb, approached down a corridor, is to be found here only in isolated cases: from an early date the houses men lived in became the model for their tombs. The interior of a huge mound of the eighth-seventh century B.C. is a replica of a hut with a roof of straw and brushwood, supported by a massive central beam and a steeply sloping ceiling. The walls of the ante-room are rough and plain; along them runs a low stone ledge. In the room at the rear, which is remarkably small, stood a primitive wooden coffin surrounded with flint pebbles, the significance of which remains a mystery. Perhaps the custom still practised in the Roman Campagna today, whereby the passer-by places a pebble wherever he finds a cross or a sacred picture marking the scene of a sudden death, may hint at some faint recollection of a funeral custom from Etruscan times. As early as the sixth century B.C. the inhabitants of Caere lived in spacious houses with gabled roofs and timbered ceilings. Such ceilings are often very elaborately imitated in the soft red tufa-stone of the

monuments. In a few of the habitations of the dead, of a later date, the cofferwork-type ceiling is also to be found. The underground vaults are often supported by massive pillars or squat columns of the style known as Tuscan, which seems to be related to the Doric with its high base and the flattened cushion of its capital. Yet they are certainly not a modification of the Dotic: they derive rather from a common pre-Greek original, the wooden column of Crete and Mycenae. Another pointer to the East is the Aeolic column, even more frequently used by the Etruscans, with its smooth or fluted trunk, at the top of which several series of volutes swell out like plants on either side, separated from each other. Similar columns are to be found represented on early Babylonian glazed tiles; so they could easily belong to the same cultural tradition which the Tyrrhenian people brought to Italy from abroad. Again, the thin ornamental bronze plates which decorated the walls of Etruscan apartments, in conformity with a practice found also in Asia Minor, point equally to a domestic custom originating in the East. In the houses of the dead these are carved out of the stone in the form of stylised round plates. The urn containing the ashes stands on the seat of a high throne, with a little foot-stool attached to it; and these too are carved direct from the solid tufa-stone.

There is a fascinating veneer of Asiatic opulence overlaying the life of these prosperous Tyrrhenian coast-towns. Of them all, Caere seems to be the most closely linked to the lost civilisation of the Aegean. In the great period of Chista the dead of the royal dynasty—the *Lukumones*—were buried with a splendour which can well be set beside that of the burials of Mycenaean princes in their beehive-tombs many centuries earlier.

In 1836 a priest and a general discovered in a vineyard, at some distance from the real necropolis of Caere, a tomb of the middle of the seventh century B.C., which has since become famous as the “Regolini-Galassi” tomb, so called after them. It lies in the heart of a mound whose periphery contains five more graves. Within are two chambers forming a gallery, which indicates the great antiquity

of the construction. The lower part of their walls is cut directly out of the solid tufa-stone, while the upper part is built of stone blocks gradually overlapping each other to form a rough kind of vault. Constructions of this kind, with primitive vaults formed of overlapping masonry over square or round chambers, are characteristic of the prehistoric Mediterranean culture, extending from the Aegean to Sardinia; and they were often used in Etruscan mausoleums of the early period. It was only in the course of the sixth century B.C. that the Tyrrhenians began to carve the habitations of their dead entirely out of the solid rock and to make their ceilings flat.

It is not recorded whether these two discoverers had the same strange and frightening experience that befell some others at the opening of Etruscan tombs; whether, in fact, at the moment when the dark shaft of the desecrated grave was opened to the light, they caught one startled glimpse of the motionless figures of the dead royal couple, luxuriously clothed and perfectly preserved as if alive—only to see them a moment later dissolve into dust, like ghostly apparitions, at the first breath of air from without.

At any rate, the Regolini-Galassi tomb had been fortunate in being spared the vandalism suffered by the five outer funeral chambers. So its discoverers found almost intact in it all the treasures with which the princely Etruscan couple—for such they were, to judge from the richness of the gifts accompanying them—had been equipped in their last dwelling-place thousands of years before. These treasures which thus emerged again out of the darkness of the centuries, a ghostly vision in the faint light of their torches, today fill an entire hall of the Vatican Museum.

When the tomb was opened, the body of a man was found in the front room on a bronze bed; in the room to the rear was a woman, covered all over in jewellery. A vessel containing ashes stood in a niche near the exit; there were also weapons and the charred remains of a war-chariot. No doubt a soldier was stationed there to guard the dead couple. The royal occupants of the tomb remain without name or history so far as we are concerned, but the things they loved and

had with them in their life and round them in their death speak eloquently to us of the splendour of the young Etruscan nation.

The extravagant taste for luxury which the Etruscans developed at the dawn of Tyrrhenian greatness has little in common with the frugal simplicity of their previous period. The princess wears on her breast, like a religious pectoral, a large round sheet of gold plate covered with an intaglio design of plants and animals in imitation of the Greek orientalising style. The fine, closely worked pattern gives an impression not unlike an exquisite embroidery. Her cloak was held together by a gold clasp made in two sections, one of the master-pieces of the goldsmith's craft from the ancient world. The first section consists of a large oval plate with five lions on it, surrounded by embossed lotus-flowers. Two hinged joints connect the larger plate with a smaller oval plate, which has minute golden ducklings marching across its curved surface in two rows. Between these little figures, which stand out vertically, the surface is further decorated with embossed lions, their shapes outlined with a microscopic *appliqué* of little gold points. This extraordinarily attractive technique of granulation, which seems to give an extra glitter to the gold ornamentation, is an achievement unique to Etruscan craftsmanship, unrivalled before or since. It is only within recent years that German goldsmiths have succeeded in rediscovering the lost secret of these tiny points of gold, as practised by the Tyrrhenian goldsmiths. (Plates 4 and 5.)

Apart from the clasp of the mantle, which was twenty inches in length, the queen also wore two arm-bands, spreading out like ruffles and lavishly decorated with human and animal shapes in embossed and granulated work. (Plate 6.) The almost barbaric extravagance of design is continued into the decoration of the inside of the arm-bands. Finally, the priceless collection is completed by two necklaces—a simple one of heavy, engraved beads of beaten gold, and another consisting of pendants of gold and ambergris—together with ear-rings, spiral finger-rings, brooches and pins of gold. In spite of the quantity, the whole collection weighs hardly more than a heap of

rose-petals. With a mastery unrivalled even by Benvenuto Cellini, the Etruscan goldsmiths knew how to work the precious metal to a fineness and delicacy so incredible that their masterpieces seem to be practically without weight. Caere was evidently a centre of this highly developed craftsmanship in gold from an early date; and her products soon displaced the foreign works of art which had originally served as models.

Apart from the gold-work, the dead king and his queen were further equipped with a great number of articles of everyday use. There were hemispherical bronze vessels on raised pedestals, with the heads of imaginary animals leaning over their rims; and round ornamental discs, with panthers' faces glaring like spectres out of the centre, their eyes enamelled and their jaws agape; and embossed silver bowls and great earthenware jars, which were filled with grain, oil, honey and even eggs for the dead; and many smaller vessels of bronze and terracotta. All these bear witness to the artistic care and taste with which even the simplest (not to mention the more expensive) articles of everyday use in the house were designed. There is even a bronze bed in the Regolini-Galassi tomb, made of rough lattice-work supported by six legs, with a head-rest; and the dead ruler was not deprived in the underworld even of his throne, the symbol of his rank. The austerity of the lines of this bronze-plated armchair with its high, straight back, and the stiff row of stylised lotus-flowers forming its head-piece, is strongly reminiscent of the throne of a mediaeval prince. Finally, we find among the funerary gifts the remains of a wide triumphal chariot, also exquisitely plated in bronze. On this we can imagine the *Lukumon* driving through his city, crowned with a golden laurel-wreath, dressed in his embroidered tunic and his mantle of purple, preceded by his heralds and lictors carrying the double axe in its bundle of rods before him as the sacred symbol of power; and we can see in him the forerunner of the Roman emperors of a later day. The bronze plating of this magnificent vehicle, like all other articles of the period, is decorated with a curvilinear design of plants, vulture-headed lions and sphinxes,

winged horses, grinning Gorgons—all motives derived from Egypt, early Greece, Babylonia and Crete. The grotesquely extravagant splendour of these orientalising designs reflects a naïve longing for luxury on the part of the youthful Etruscan nation, which was still groping eagerly for a style of its own.

All the treasures from the Regolini-Galassi tomb are now housed in the secular simplicity of a hall in the Vatican Museum. The delicate gold-work gleams dully against the dark velvet of the cases. The dark-green patina of the centuries has long since dimmed the warm golden sheen of the ancient bronzes. Yet even in the cool light of the exhibition-room everything is still enmeshed in the secret magic that envelops all relics of the vanished Etruscan culture. Behind them stand the shadowy forms, still clearly distinguishable, of a legendary people whose way of life they faithfully reflect.

But it is not only in the funerary gifts that the tombs of Caere furnish us with a reconstruction of life in this wealthy commercial town. We are indebted to them also for the first clear representations of the personal appearance of the Etruscans in archaic times. It was here that the famous terracotta sarcophagi were found, dating from about the middle of the sixth century B.C., the earliest of a long series of earthenware (and later stone) sarcophagi whose lids bear figures of the dead, usually represented half-reclining, as at a banquet.

The most beautiful of Caere's earthenware sarcophagi stands in the Museum of the Villa Giulia at Rome. It is in the form of a sumptuous bed, with a carved support in the Ionic style. On the cushions lies a couple, half-sitting up: the husband accompanied by his wife at a banquet, as was the Etruscan custom. To the patriarchal habits of the rustic Romans, whose womenfolk played a much less public part in life, this practice seemed altogether improper, as did the prominent position of women in general among the Tyrrhenians, which was another indication of their inner affinity with the culture of the Aegean. But the numerous representations of such loving couples, united even in death, point clearly to the high regard in which marriage was held by the Etruscans. The gesture, at once

protective and loving, with which the man on the Caere sarcophagus lets his right arm rest on the woman's shoulder, while his left hand lies on her arm, evokes a feeling of such strong and tender union even in death that it is impossible not to be touched. (Plate 8.)

A lofty calm and the self-assurance of a powerful people find expression in the gravely dignified bearing of this noble couple. The once brilliant colouring of the sarcophagus is almost completely worn away; gone too are the enamelled eyes, which must once have given their faces an uncannily lifelike stare.

In spite of stylistic restraints, which still prevented the Etruscans' inclination towards naturalistic portraiture from breaking through in the sixth century B.C., the faces of the couple have an extraordinary expressiveness. There is an ironic reserve in the proud smile that barely turns up the corners of the mouth: they know much, and they are unafraid. Behind the archaic smoothness of these utterly unfamiliar faces lies the vitality of a people and a world that we shall never attain the power to understand.

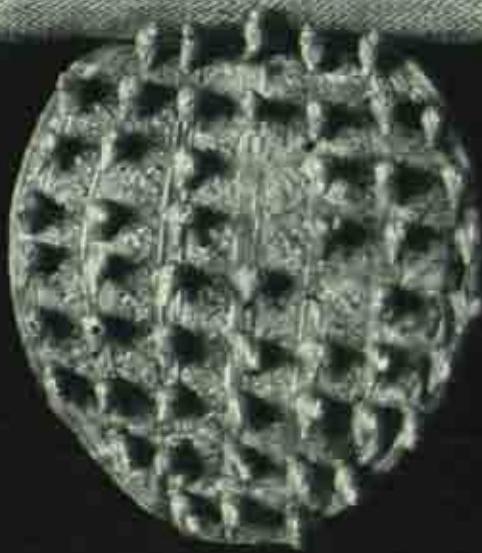
Ready for the eternal banquet of another world (not yet, we must suppose, conceived in any dualistic sense at this period of the Etruscan nation's greatness), the couple sit on the couch in their finest array. Their hair is beautifully dressed in long, stylised tresses. The man has a pointed beard, in the fashion of the time. The woman's head is covered with the characteristic Etruscan *tutulus*, a little round close-fitting cap. Her sumptuous dress spreads out in stiff folds. Her hands are outstretched in a sacrificial gesture. The tense lines and the inner coherence of expression of this, the earliest life-size Etruscan work of portraiture so far discovered, are reminiscent of sculptures of the Middle Ages.

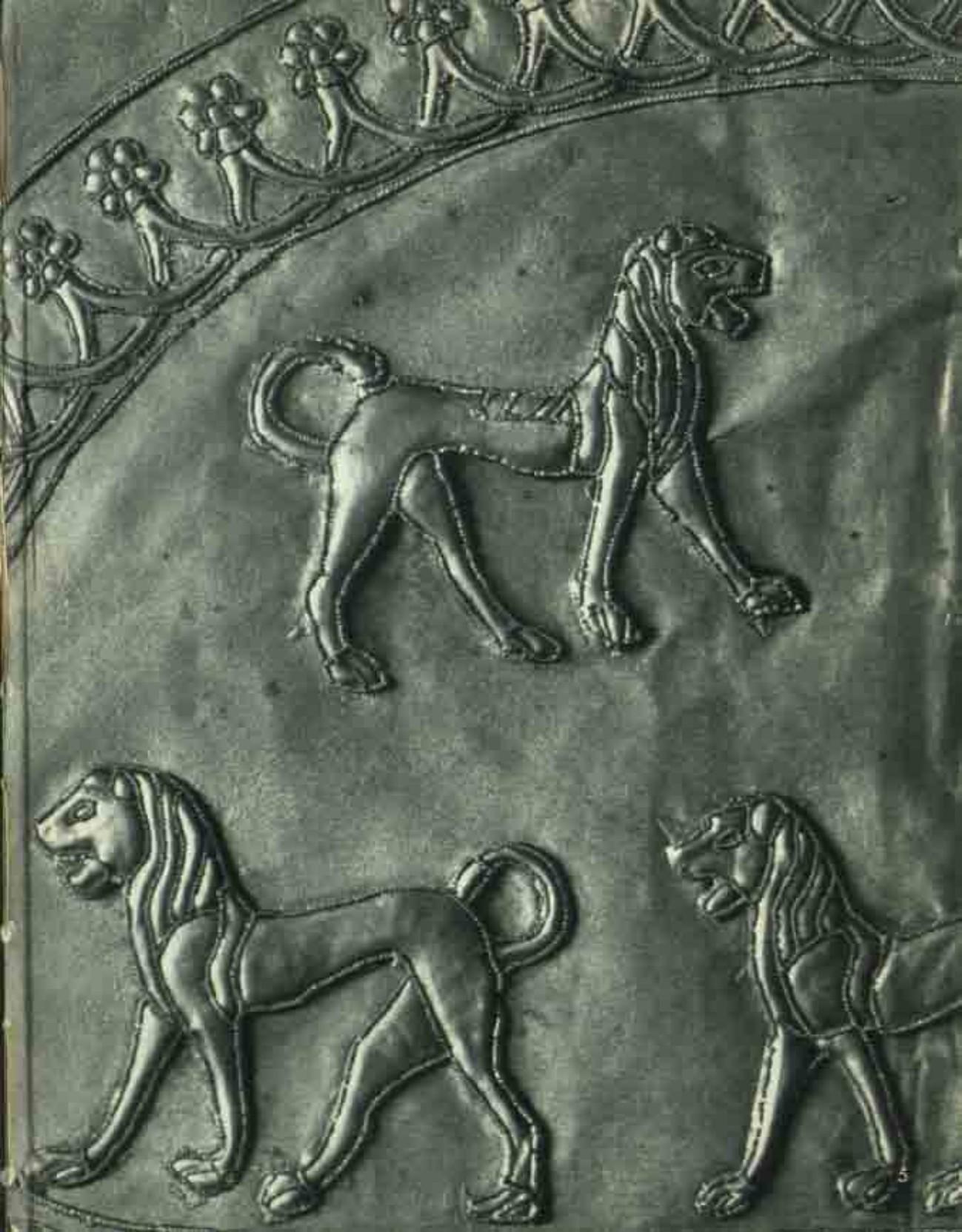
At this stage of development in Etruscan art, the orientalising period can be regarded as having reached its close a quarter of a century earlier. Ionic and Attic influence is becoming more and more strongly perceptible, thanks especially to the importation of large numbers of Greek vases. Caere's port of Pyrgi was virtually a Greek factory under Etruscan supervision; Punicum, to judge by its

3. Phallic symbols placed at the entrance to a tomb at Caere, showing the number, age and sex of its occupants.

4 and 5. Gold clasp (seventh century B.C.) from the Regolini-Galassi tomb at Caere.









name, we may well take to have been a Carthaginian free port; and Caere itself was always exceptionally susceptible to the attraction of Anatolian Ionia. Possibly faint memories from the Anatolian past also played their part. In any case the early earthenware of Caere bears a markedly Ionian stamp. The slanting almond-shaped eyes of the two figures on the sarcophagus, for instance, are typical features of Ionian art at this date.

Grave-robbers were attracted at all periods by the legendary treasures of the Tyrrhenian cities of the dead. They plundered a large proportion of the tombs of Caere, so that finds of the same importance as this great earthenware coffin have a quite exceptional value by reason of their rarity. At one time, no doubt, all these habitations of the dead, which are now empty, were furnished with an opulence which perhaps even exceeded that of the houses of the living.

The special quality of the tufa-stone in the neighbourhood of Caere has resulted in the decomposition of the colours which, as appears from a few remaining traces, were applied to the walls and ceiling. Certainly Caere had developed its particular artistic style more fully than almost any other important Etruscan town; but in her case it was devoted to architecture and figures rather than to painting, which plays so large a rôle in the neighbouring necropolis of Tarquinia. In the tombs of Caere colour is used not so much in great fresco-paintings, as at Tarquinia, but rather to emphasise architectural detail and to enliven reliefs. One tomb in particular provides a clear example of this practice. It dates from the third century B.C., a late period when communal tombs were increasingly displacing the gracious intimacy of earlier habitations of the dead; and its single large chamber provides resting-places for twenty bodies. A stairway, guarded by two lions of mouldering tufa-stone, leads steeply down into the underground room, which is decorated throughout with coloured reliefs. Along the walls run niches containing the beds of the more important members of the family; the rest are placed in a row on a sort of platform. In the middle of the back wall a wide alcove opens out, where the head of the family lies

with his wife. The fiction of life is maintained with a touching devotion in this scene. On the delicately carved bed of stone lie two coloured cushions, lightly indented by the heads resting on them. A small foot-stool, with the dainty sandals of the woman lying on it, stands in front of the bed; and at the foot of it is a little table with writing materials on it, and at the head the master's stick, leaning against it. Two Aeolic columns flank their resting-place, cut in relief out of the tufa-stone like everything else; on these the portrait-heads of the couple were fastened. Below, their everyday possessions can still be seen; a shield, a helmet, a sword and greaves for the man; a fan, jewellery and a shallow bowl for the woman. Typhon, the snake-tailed god of the underworld, carrying a broad executioner's sword, stands guard at the front end of the bed with Cerberus beside him; and his sombre features are the only hint that this tranquil scene of domestic life is no more than a mask to hide the inexorability of death. For to him the whole town is dedicated.

The desperate longing to carry over at least an illusion of this world into the other—a world which was at this period increasingly pictured by distorted superstition as a place of terror—has nowhere else bequeathed to us so numerous or such valuable clues to the daily life of the Tyrrhenian people in the third century B.C. as in this tomb. Even the two mighty pillars which support the sloping roof of the chamber carry all round them a sort of illustrated catalogue of the entire contents of an Etruscan house. We find geese and a pig, a dog, an animal like a cat (no longer to be found in Italy today, but evidently regarded by the Etruscans as a domestic animal), all represented with a lifelike charm. Above them can be seen hunting and fishing tackle—a sling and a hook, for instance—with a selection of tools and kitchen utensils, and even a large round cheese such as the peasants of this neighbourhood still make, and a low games-table, with a pocket for money. All of them are painted in vivid though faded colours, which make this home of the dead still more unreal, and the serenity of its world of illusion still more supernatural. (Plates 10 and 11.)

All these monuments of the Etruscan cult of the dead bear witness to a deep affinity with, and a complete dedication to, those motive principles of existence which guided this primitive European people, in the form of beautiful but sinister and merciless deities, along the path that led to the fulfilment of its destiny: a glorification of death which is at the same time a glorification of life, with an intemperate extravagance that we find terrifying. Like trespassers, we wander at a loss through the silent network of roads in this town of the dead; we descend into the depths of its tombs and try to divine their secret. But it is in vain that we seek to interpret this vision from a forgotten age of mankind, like a dream that slips from the grasp in waking.

Today the dead have been evicted from the necropolis of Caere, and it is decked with flowers like a garden city. Roses bloom along the solitary streets; cypresses crown the rounded summit of the hill; in summer-time the broom burns bright above the brown tufa-stone. In places the illusion of a town is almost perfect, for a number of the tombs look just like houses even on the outside: those little square houses with tiny windows and outside staircases which are today still typical of Italian mediaeval villages. Their quadrangular sub-structure is composed of massive tufa-slabs, on which are built several regular rows of cut stone. The window-like openings in the smooth walls and the steps leading up to the tops of these buildings, arched over with a flat mound of earth like a roof, complete the impression of a house.

At one time new inhabitants came daily to this town, and generation after generation of the inhabitants of Caere were received into it over thousands of years of expansion. The blood of sacrificial victims flowed unceasingly into the greedy red earth, and the flames from the sacrifices to the dead mounted up to heaven; and this town of the "other people," in which the past and the future of those beyond the ravine were united, might well itself be the magic symbol of destiny. Its expansion meant death, and yet at the same time new life; and only when the process came to a standstill was Caere truly dead.

Cut deep into the tufa-rock is the *Via degli Inferi* (the Road of the Underworld), which once connected Caere with its necropolis. It still leads from one level to the other, out of the dazzling light that blazes over the opened tombs, out of the bare landscape of the hills down into the ravine, into the cool twilight of a forest of evergreen holm-oaks and dense undergrowth which overruns part of the sepulchral town, thrusting its roots deep down into the hiding-places of the dead. Right and left of the narrow road gape the dark shafts of empty funeral chambers, over whose roofs the ivy has grown. In the spring pale clematis, violets and cyclamen blossom in this silent wood, where the traces of the dead have vanished. The paths that once branched off the main roads are completely overgrown by a luxuriant wilderness; they are now alternately a bed for streams and a track for beasts. Yet the old road with its deep chariot-ruts and its sharp bends seems as well-worn today as if it were still in use between the two towns. Involuntarily the eye moves up from the bottom of the ravine to the almost vertical precipice of the tufa-cliff, crowned with dark holm-oaks, to search out the cyclopean masonry of Etruscan Chisra. But the ridge on the other side now bears only olives, rustling in the wind; hardly a stone still stands to speak of the buried life of a thousand years of empire. Only the melancholy mounds of the city of the dead now remain to tell us of a world whose secret still casts its special shadow over the landscape bordering the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Chapter Four

TARQUINIA : MOTHERLAND OF THE ETRUSCAN NATION

IMMEDIATELY adjoining the territory of Caere lay that of Tarquinia, the legendary motherland of the Etruscan people. Close to the port of Civitavecchia two high ridges can be seen rising above the level of the coastal plain, which merges into a gently rising slope as it runs inland. On one of the two ridges once stood the walled capital city of the Tyrrhenians; the other belonged to the dead.

In the Middle Ages fate reversed the roles of the two hilltops, choosing that previously dedicated to the underworld for the site of a new emergence of life out of the soil that had once been hollowed out into long-forgotten tombs. The new town that grew up here about the sixth century A.D. was called Cornietum. As a result of the proximity of the sea, and the navigability of the River Marta (which then poured down the ravine between the two heights, but today is almost dry), and above all of the fertility of the soil, which the Etruscans had cultivated for more than a thousand years, Cornietum soon grew into a rich commercial town. Its mediaeval glory is still testified by its strong battlements, its narrow gateways and its many fine churches. Later, it is true, Cornietum lost its importance, and finally lost even its name; today the town is again called Tarquinia. The fifteen hundred years of its history are reduced to a shadow by the resurgence of the Etruscan world out of the painted tombs of ancient Tarchuna. Since the fifteenth century, when the rediscovery of the necropolis began, this lost world has taken shape again to such an impressive extent that the very existence of Cornietum has come to seem almost unreal.

A steep, white road leads up to the town between withered olive-groves, whose scanty leafage gives no protection from the sun. Behind the gate of the town a broad empty square opens out, a sort of terrace on the steep precipice of rock, which commands an uninterrupted view over the sea and the motley expanse of fertile country. Far out to sea appear the shadowy outlines of the Tyrrhenian islands, and Elba rises steeply out of the gleaming ocean. At the point where sky and water merge in a pale blue haze, the imagination conjures up the silhouette of the island of Monte Cristo, which the eye can barely distinguish.

This is the landscape over which Tarchuna, the great forerunner of Rome, still steeped in the radiance of the Aegean world of the Bronze Age, once sat in majesty on her grey and rocky throne.

In the early centuries of the Tyrrhenian empire, Tarchuna was a powerful commercial capital, which constituted the spiritual focus of the nation and the guardian of the Etruscan tradition. Similarly, too, it probably held the political leadership within the confederation of Etruscan city-states. Tyrrhenian tradition speaks of a certain *Lukumon* as having once stood at the head of the rulers of the other allied cities; and there is much evidence that this role fell to the kings of Tarquinia, at least for a time.

But the religious importance of this town for the rest of Etruria was even greater than its political pre-eminence. The mythical heroes at the beginning of its history—Tyrrhenos, who led his people across the sea to Italy, and Tarchon, his brother or son, to whom the foundation of Tarchuna is ascribed—raise it to the rank of a sacred metropolis for the whole nation. Even the deities themselves chose this place, according to the legend, to reveal themselves to the people that were to find their new home here, when a peasant's plough caused the boy-god *Tages* to emerge from the earth. From him, it is said, the Tyrrhenians learned to recognise the will of the immortals and to construct their youthful community on the pattern of the strict laws laid down by the immortals.

The cycle of legends surrounding the early period of Tarquinia

clearly recognises it as the point of origin of the political and religious structure of the Etruscan people. The role played by the royal family of the Tarquins in the legendary history of Rome is further evidence of the close links between this powerful Tyrrhenian city-state and Latium. Behind the colourful tapestry of legend from the period of the Roman kings lies concealed the historical fact of an early Etruscan period at Rome. The very name of Rome implies a connection with the Etruscan word *ruma*, and therefore also perhaps an immediate dependence on Tarquinia. It is not for nothing that the distinguishing marks of secular power at Rome are of Etruscan origin. The bundle of rods, the *sella curulis* (chair of state), the laurel-wreath and the purple—all these symbols of power in Rome bore the stamp of Etruscan origin; and probably even the custom of the triumph was taken over from the Tyrrhenians. Among the mausoleums at Caere, the inscriptions even make it possible to identify the family tombs of the Tarquins—a proof of the historical actuality of the dynasty.

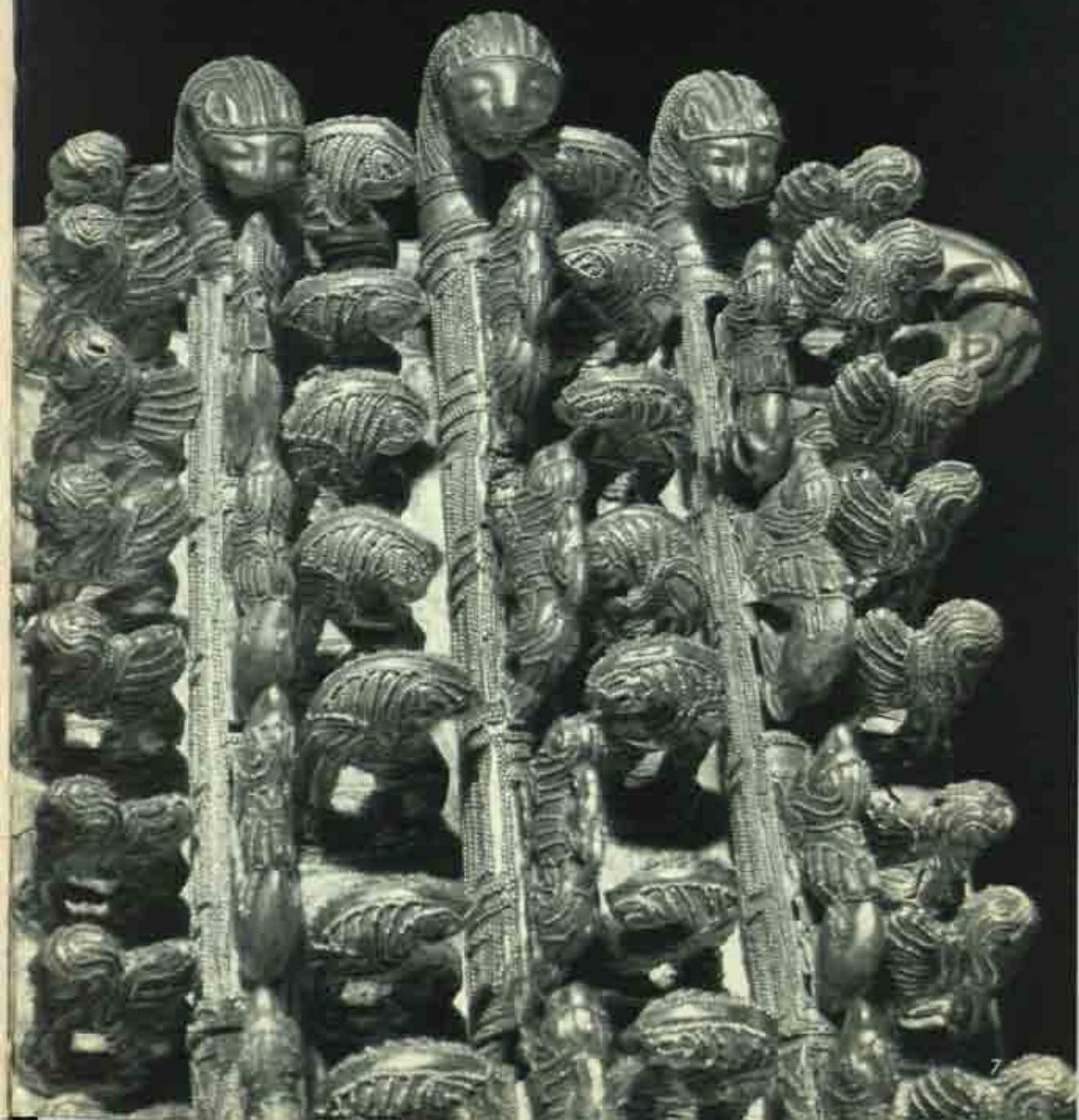
When this princely family of the Etruscans was driven out of Rome at the beginning of the fifth century B.C., the event was a turning-point in the destiny of Tarquinia as well. Its pre-eminence in Etruria was now gradually lost, as a result of the secession of Latium, the loss of Campania, and the elimination of Etruscan sea-power. Yet Tarquinia was still an antagonist to be taken very seriously at the beginning of the fourth century, when hostilities broke out between Rome and the Etruscan city-states. Its territory still covered about 200,000 acres even at that date. Towards the middle of the fourth century B.C., when Veii had already fallen the first victim in the mortal struggle between Etruria and Rome, war blazed up with Tarchuna. This war between the representative of the old Tyrrhenian empire, traditional and conservative, and the people that embodied the new-found Latin will to power, was conducted with that implacable bitterness which always characterises a struggle between two irreconcilable historic forces. The hatred between the two cities, once so closely connected, became so fierce in the course

of these hostilities that the Etruscans once sacrificed 307 Roman prisoners of war to their gods, and the Romans revenged this atrocity by stoning and beheading 358 Tyrrhenian nobles in the Forum. Only after eight years of bloodshed was a truce finally agreed upon, to last for forty years. Tarquinia thus remained unconquered; but she was never again able to halt the Roman expansion in southern Etruria.

After the forty years of truce had expired, the flames of war blazed up again; and this time fate decided finally against the older power, which was compelled after three more years of war to renew the truce with Rome. The result was that Tarquinia, the proud symbol of the glory of the Tyrrhenian nation, lost her freedom of commerce like Caere and was gradually incorporated into the political system of Rome. It seems that in time the old hatred was forgotten; for in 204 B.C., when the Roman fleet was being equipped to fight the Tyrrhenians' former ally, Carthage, Tarquinia even supplied the sail-cloth that was to carry the ships to Africa. Two decades later the Romans founded their port of Graviscae in the vicinity of the town; and a hundred years later still, Tarchuna acquired the right of Roman citizenship.

Nowhere are the sphinx-like features of the Etruscan past so vivid; nowhere else does the exciting chiaroscuro of Tyrrhenian life stand out in such rich colours, as in the painted tombs of Tarchuna and the treasures which they house. It is not only the lustrous reflection of Tarchuna's prosperity that is to be seen in the costly funeral gifts, often brought from distant lands, that accompanied the dead within the four walls of their brilliantly decorated dwellings. There is also the tragedy of an inexorable decline to be traced in outline among the works of art of the later Etruscan period.

The greater part of the finds from the successive excavations of the necropolis at Tarchuna, during approximately the last 200 years, is now preserved in the fifteenth-century palace of the Vitelleschi, whose austere façade dominates the main square of modern Tarchuna.





Here in the shady colonnade of the *Cortile*, and in the former living-rooms of the palace, stand the heavy stone and earthenware sarcophagi of the Tyrrhenians. They all belong to a substantially later date than the earthenware sarcophagi of Caere. The oldest of them date from the second half of the fourth century B.C., when the Etruscan empire was already drawing to its close. Over all these figures of Tyrrhenian men and women, resting in formal poses on their couches of stone, there already hangs the proud melancholy of an ancient race that knows itself to be doomed to vanish. The joy of life that belonged to the archaic period has vanished, and with it the brilliant exuberance, the naive pleasure in visual form and colour. In their place has come an introspective quality, a terrifying power of expression, and a greater precision of form under the influence of the early Hellenistic period.

On many sarcophagi the carvings have a firmness of outline that approximates to the Gothic. The various figures are no longer shown exclusively at banquets; sometimes they recline outstretched in repose. Their clothing falls in austere, straight folds of drapery; one hand grasps a shallow bowl—the *patera* with an obol in it, for entry-fee to the underworld. Yet they are not sleeping like the mediaeval monks on their monuments, transfigured in an eternal unconsciousness: their eyes are open, staring into the void, awake but unseeing.

The Etruscan artists' inclination towards naturalism and sharp characterisation produced plastic portraits of high quality as early as the fourth century B.C.; and it is reasonable to see in these examples the forerunners of later Roman portraiture. The features they teach us to recognise are no longer those of the conquering Tyrrhenians of the earlier archaic period, but rather those of a people that knows itself to be surrounded by enemies and engaged in a struggle which it feels to be hopeless. Gone are the vigour and vitality with which many of the early works are stamped, despite the limitations of the archaic style in the oldest portraits: for instance, the Canopus heads from Chiusi. But there is a sharp emphasis on the typical features of this controversial people, which can be seen particularly in many of

the male portraits: for instance, the aristocratic lines of the narrow nose, slightly or more emphatically curved, sometimes almost coming to a point; the slight down-turn of the corners of the mouth, austere and yet at the same time sensual; the somewhat deep-set eyes under the straight brow; the prominent cheek-bones and the strong chin, completing the rectangular outline of the face. Even in the fuller features of many of the later sarcophagus figures, portrayed by their artists with a mercilessly lifelike realism that is unpleasantly effective, the masterful lines of the true Etruscan features can still be faintly detected. A prejudiced examination, which was not even based on all the material brought to light by the excavations of the last few centuries, at one time led to a reconstruction of the Etruscan national type simply from the *obesus Etruscus*, the fat degenerate Etruscan of the later period of decline. But such specimens of a dying nation which no longer believed in itself and sought to forget its destiny in extravagant and sophisticated luxury, are just as untypical of the Etruscans as the worthless Romans of the declining Empire, with their addiction to vice and gluttony, were untypical examples of the nation that had a few generations earlier achieved the grandeur that was Rome.

Just as the Etruscan language shows no similarity with any other, the monuments of the Tyrrhenian race are equally distinct from those of the ancient populations both of Europe and (so far as they are known to us) of Asia Minor. Nor is there any semitic or negroid or Mongolian element in them; and again, the angular, broad-nosed faces that we know from Hittite works of art bear no resemblance to the features of the Etruscans.

The ethnological expert, E. Fischer, classifies the Etruscan race as "aquiline" on the strength of the shape of its nose, and assigns it to a category on its own in the Italian family tree. The aquiline nose is still strikingly common in central Italy, and especially in the areas that were demonstrably once Etruscan. Even Dante, the inspired prophet and creative artist who came from Mantua (a town named after Mantu, the Etruscan god of the underworld), is often regarded

today as a descendant of the Tyrrhenians on the basis of the surviving portraits and the measurements taken from his skull.

The definition of the Etruscan race as "aquiline" naturally implies nothing about the descent of the Tyrrhenians. With reference to the theory of an immigration of the Etruscans from Asia Minor, E. Fischer points to the results of the latest investigations by Krogmann, who in the course of his excavations in Alisar came upon evidence of the existence of "alpine" races in Asia Minor. Fischer consequently considers it not impossible that the Etruscans were descended from the Indo-European highlanders who overran Asia Minor in successive waves about 2000 B.C.

Whatever may have been the origin of this people, with the mysterious melancholy that overshadows their features of stone, there is no mistaking the stamp of greatness on their pensive foreheads; there is a dignity in their grave poise that bespeaks a people of high and ancient culture. No one who has seen it will forget the poignantly beautiful remoteness of the aristocratic head of the "Nobleman," reclining on one of the sarcophagi in the Palazzo Vitelleschi, with his guard of lions and sphinxes; no one who has stood before the silent figures of the dead Etruscans on their couches of stone can escape a strangely moving awareness of the tragedy of a noble race.

The four sides of the sarcophagus are decorated in relief with gruesome scenes of battle and sacrifice from Greek mythology; with representations of the journey of the dead to the underworld; and with stags torn limb from limb by fabulous monsters, or awe-inspiring demons. Inscriptions record the name and rank of the dead. Richly robed women gaze proudly from the stone coffins on which they rest in self-assured composure: one of them bears the curiously beautiful name of Ramtha Apatrui. A corpulent public official, Laris Pulenas, holds a rolled length of parchment in his hand, on which is inscribed one of the longest Etruscan texts yet found. It lists the offices and honours held by the dead man; such, at least, is the common interpretation. (Plates 12 and 13.)

Besides the Etruscan sarcophagi from the later period of Tarchuna,

the halls of the Palazzo Vitelleschi also contain quantities of funerary gifts from the necropolis, in which can be seen reflected every phase of the life of Tarquinia. First of all, there are the primitive earthenware vessels of the Villanova culture; for the settlement on the highest point of Tarquinia, like that of Caere, begins in the early Iron Age. Their squat shapes are then replaced by more splendid objects from the orientalising period. The extent of the ancient Etruscans' maritime trade is reflected in the opulence and variety of their imports. There is early Greek pottery from Corinth and Rhodes; Phoenician ivory and silverware; porcelain vases, scarabs and little Egyptian figurines of soapstone. Beside these foreign luxuries there are domestic products such as the so-called "Pontic" vases, probably originating from Vulci, with mythological pictures in black on a light ground; and *bucchero* vessels, gleaming like polished coal. The Etruscans constantly appear as the mediators of Greek civilisation in Italy; and the refinement of their taste shows itself later in their passionate attachment to Attic vases. We have this attachment to thank for by far the greater proportion of all the Greek pottery that has survived. The tombs of Tarquinia contained a large quantity of specially selected examples, part of which are still to be seen in the Palazzo Vitelleschi.

In comparison with the perfection of these Greek works of art, the Etruscan imitations of such painted vases naturally seem like clumsy efforts by children. But the earthy-black *bucchero*-ware, which was designed to stand on the ground and about which more will be said later, has an individual beauty of a somewhat barbaric kind, if only in the multiplicity and quaintness of its shapes and decoration. There are works of great fascination in this field, as in every other where the originality of the Etruscan character had free scope.

Among the funerary gifts from the tombs of Tarquinia, there is also a find of great importance for the dating of the orientalising period. This is a tall, pale green vase of Egyptian porcelain with an inscription which connects it with the XXVIIth dynasty Pharaoh, Bokorinef. It is known that his reign falls at the end of the eighth

century B.C.; and it can be assumed that the vase was imported into Etruria not so very long after its manufacture, before following its owner to his last resting-place. It follows that the beginning of the seventh century B.C. can be assigned as a fairly firm date to the grave in which it was found, and similarly to all other graves containing similar objects.

The necropolis of ancient Tarchuna reaches almost up to the walls of present-day Tarquinia, whose cemetery was constructed, by an extraordinary chance, immediately above the last of the Etruscan tombs.

The marked individualism of the separate Etruscan city-states, which makes the collective features of the Etruscan nation and its art stand out so clearly, also gives each of their cities of the dead its special appearance. Just as the inhabitants of Caere used to love the massive lines of their architecture and to carve out of the golden-brown tufa-stone a faithful reproduction of the home that they had lived in during their earthly life, so the citizens of Tarchuna wanted to be surrounded in their last home with vistas of brilliantly coloured pictures.

Painted tombs are also to be found in other cities of the dead: at Orvieto, Chiusi and Veii, for instance. But nowhere are there so many as at Tarquinia. The underground paintings of the necropolis of Tarquinia have preserved invaluable clues to the lost life of Etruria and its religious and spiritual foundations, from the brilliant beginning to the very end, which it had so long foreseen with its melancholy belief in destiny.

The city of the dead, which extends nearly two miles long by two-thirds of a mile wide, is only partly occupied by funeral mounds. Many of the dwellings of the dead were sunk deep in the rock, and probably identified on the surface only by stone memorials. It is pleasant in the summer to stroll out to these cool sepulchres of the lost Tyrrhenian people. They lie like coloured jewels beneath the rippling surface of the ripe cornfields, or the fiery-coloured carpet of the poppy-strewn meadows. The sinuous road leads past the arches

of a mediaeval aqueduct, and at one point crosses a deep cutting in the plateau, down which there is a view of the summit of a knoll lying directly opposite. On this knoll once stood Tarchuna, the town of king and priest. A group of grey blocks of stone, which from a distance look like broken rocks scattered at random, is all that is now left of it. Once a road used to pass through this cutting, to connect the city of the living with that of the dead.

All trace of the city of the living is now almost gone. There survive only the remains of the city wall, built of regular squared blocks; and a fragment of the wide main street, which must once have led to the sea-coast with its harbours nearby; and the stone base of a large shrine and a small semi-circular temple. But all of these date from the late period of Tarquinia, long after the beginning of its conversion from an Etruscan into a Roman town. So here too it is the dead alone who preserve the real legacy of the Tyrrhenian people. Only in their dwellings, sunk deep in the bosom of the earth, is there still to be found a shadowy reflection of the ancient culture of the lost capital, steeped in its manifold influences and its manifold knowledge, and of its wealthy, cosmopolitan life.

In most cases a long row of steps hewn out of the soft tufa-stone, slightly worn down in the middle by the steps of passers-by three thousand years ago, leads deep down into the tombs. Only a few of them lie close to the surface. Rusty iron gates now replace the heavy stone doors or slabs which once closed them, and the chill light of electric bulbs unfeelingly strips bare their secrets.

The separate rooms of the underground habitations are small and intimate, almost without architectural ornament. But they are enlivened by a mass of splendid wall-paintings in brilliant colours—or they were so, for the first few centuries. Even the ceilings are painted, so that the dead could enjoy surroundings that reflected all the pleasures of this world, the highest pinnacle of which, so the archaic period believed, was promised in the world to come.

Thanks to the dampness of the walls, the many colours of the tomb-paintings—dark red, translucent green, brown, turquoise blue,

and a brilliant yellow—gleam here and there with an astonishing freshness even today. Sometimes they were applied direct to the polished stone, prepared only with a varnish; but generally they were put on over a thin coat of plaster.

Perhaps, of all the art-forms of the Etruscans, painting is the most intimately connected with the cultural worlds of Asia Minor, Egypt, and especially the Aegean and Greece, whose orbits intersected each other at so many points. It still has something of the mysterious radiance, the impenetrable character of primitive civilisation, even when the end of the orientalising period had left it formally so deep under the spell of Greek painting. Apart from Greek vase-painting, only the Tyrrhenian wall-paintings give any conception of its vanished beauty. Admittedly Etruscan painting never attains the clear, delicate beauty and perfect precision of the Greeks: its designs never quite shake off a certain earthy heaviness, its colours are often brutally harsh. The vigour of the Etruscans' vital consciousness and artistic perception, which is quite foreign to the Hellenic, continually bursts through the media of expression they so skilfully adapted from the Greeks. As in the case of the plastic arts, Greek form is only the outer shell enclosing a quite different content.

The oldest frescoes in the necropolis of Tarquinia date from the first half of the sixth century B.C.: that is to say, from a phase when the Ionic (and, a little later, the Attic) influence on technique, subjects and mythological themes was beginning to become apparent in Etruscan painting. At Veii there is a funeral chamber embedded in a slope of the hill, with wall-paintings from the end of the seventh or the beginning of the sixth century B.C.—the oldest so far discovered—which belong to the orientalising period. Their startling colours and quaint representations of fabulous beasts and tiny horsemen on huge, brightly coloured horses, with an echo of certain Cretan vase-paintings, give them the unreality of a pattern in tapestry. On the other hand, the frescoes so far found at Tarquinia have passed beyond this primarily decorative style of art, and can be called paintings in the true sense.

The "Tomb of the Bull" is the earliest monument decorated with such paintings. It was once surmounted by a large mound, the traces of which can still be seen. A steep staircase led down to an *atrium*, behind which were two smaller rooms—the actual cavities of the graves. Stone ledges, on which no doubt the corpses were laid, run along the walls. There is nothing to recall the idea of death in these underground chambers, least of all in the graceful paintings which enliven the damp walls with their simple charm. Even the passage of thousands of years has not been able to destroy the brilliance of their colours, the gay vitality of their lines, the atmosphere of delight in life and beauty, which robs this place of death of any trace of melancholy.

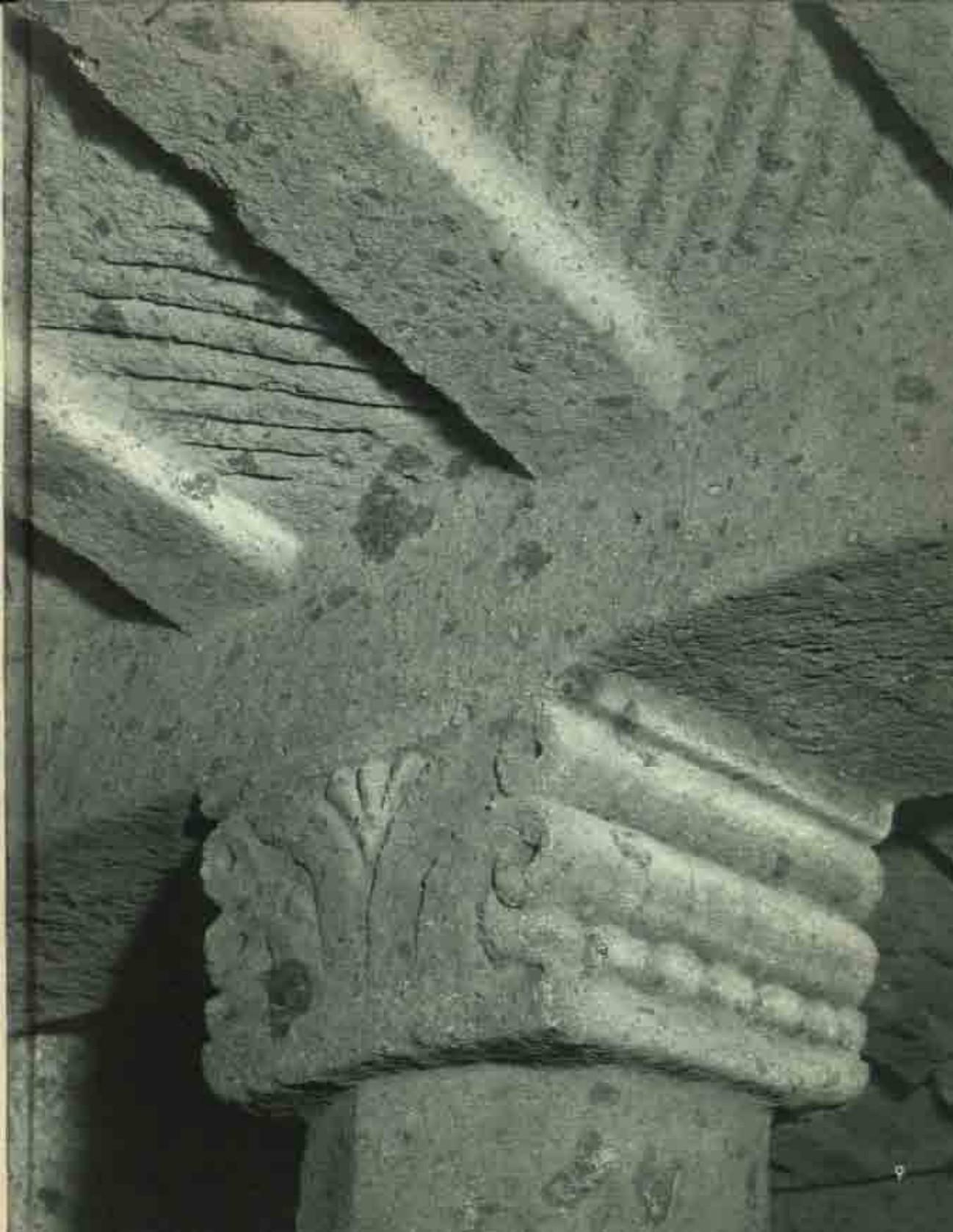
The cheerful ante-room, with its sloping roof-shaped ceiling and its central beam picked out with a broad streak of red, was presumably the scene of the solemn funeral banquet. On the wall between the two doorways into the inner chamber there stands out a large painting, rather like a Gobelin tapestry, showing Achilles waiting in ambush for Troilus at the spring. The warrior in his armour hides behind the high artificial basin of the fountain, on which lie two stone lions that serve as water-spouts. Troilus approaches—a naked youth riding on a huge horse, wearing on his feet the high pointed shoes that were part of the archaic Etruscan fashion, and on his head a sort of cap with a kerchief fluttering from it. A palm-tree with two clusters of fruit, perhaps reminiscent of some Babylonian original, and bushes and branches embellish the landscape. Below the picture is a row of graceful little trees hung with garlands, wreaths and ribbons: a *motif* which recurs in almost all the early tombs. Perhaps there is a survival here of the traditions of the old Cretan religion and art, with its amalgamation of plant-life and human life, and its elemental delight in growth and fruition. It is also possible that in their early period the Tyrrhenians preserved the tree-worship of which Crete had once been the centre. (Plate 14.)

The Cretan people's sensitivity to the unity of man and nature, which is so remarkably expressed in the creative works of this great

9. Detail of the Ceiling of the "Tomb of Capitals," Caere.

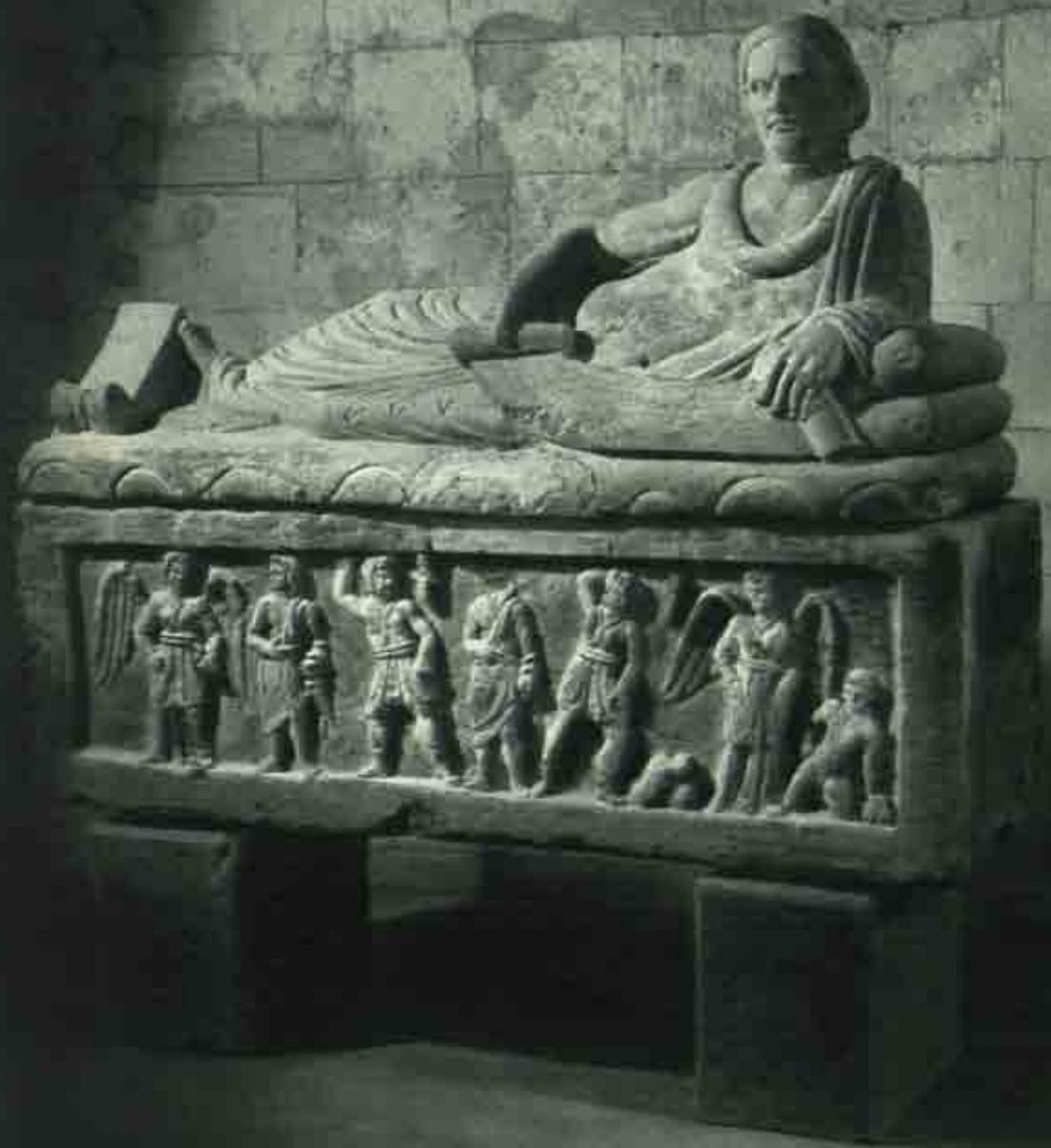
10 and 11. The "Tomb of Reliefs": entrance and chamber of the dead (fourth to second century B.C.), Caere.

12 and 13. The sarcophagus of Lars Pulenas, Tarquinia.

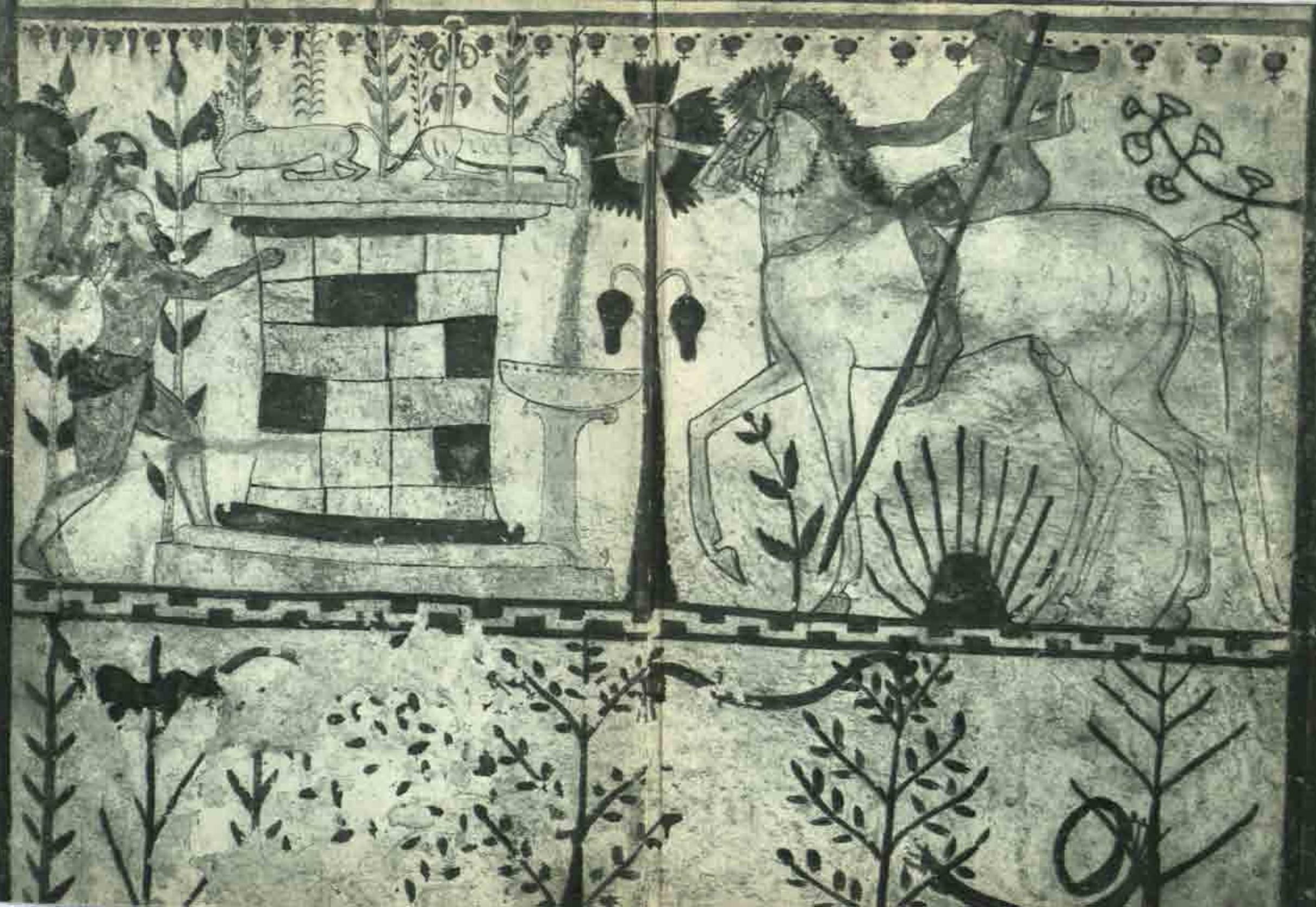


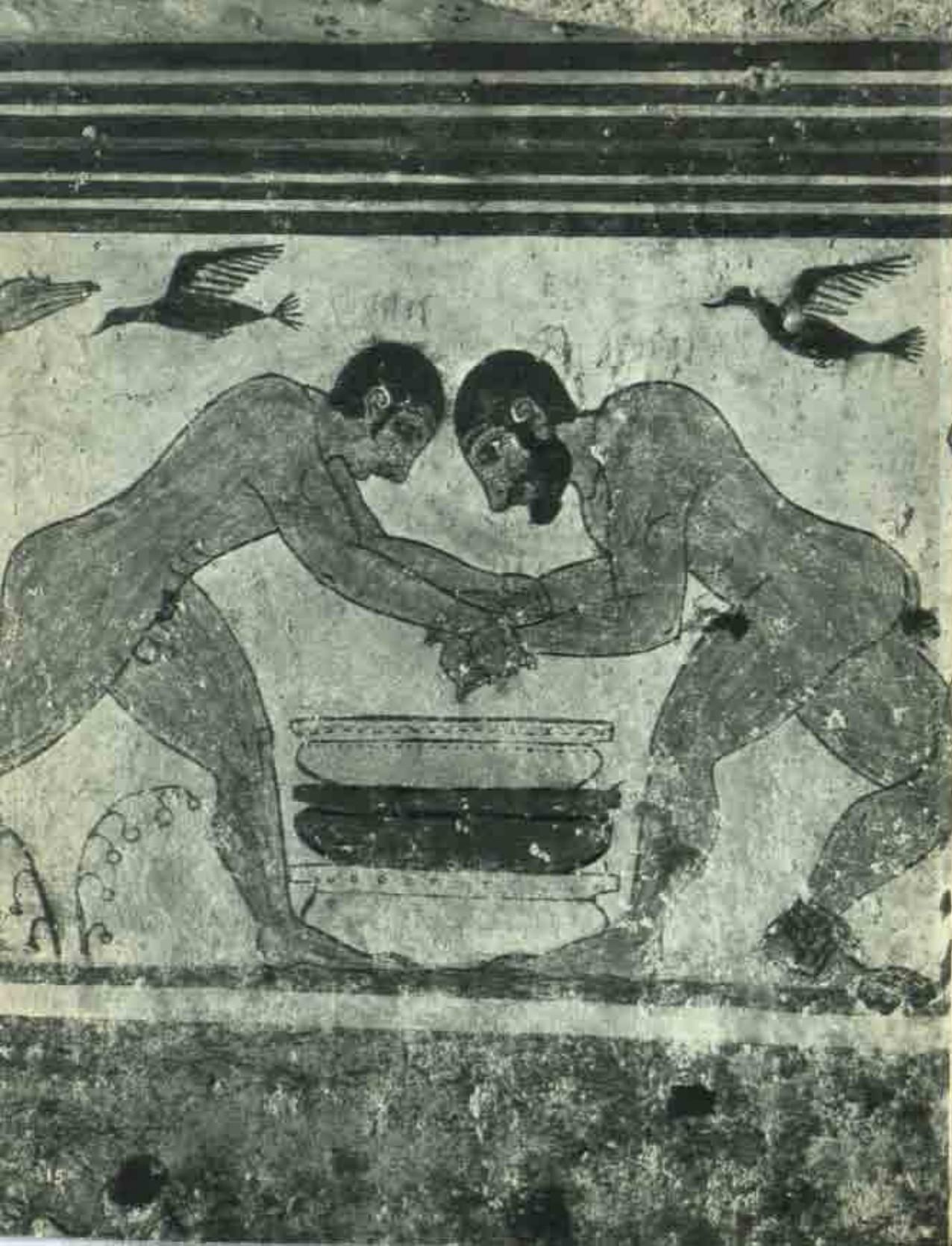












culture of the ancient Aegean world, must certainly be related to that of the Etruscans. The same intimate sense of union with nature was equally characteristic of the Tyrrhenian people, whose religious rites presupposed a keen observation of all manifestations of life. In works of art it found expression, among other examples, in the artist's anxiety always to place his figures in natural surroundings, rather than in an empty space. Animals, trees, shrubs and flowers took their place in life on equal terms in their eyes; and this tendency produced in isolated cases something not unlike a true landscape.

The upper half of the painted rear-wall of the *atrium* in the Tomb of the Bull is divided into two sectors. The *tympanum* formed by the sloping gable of the ceiling is filled with fabulous beasts rushing wildly across the scene, including *Chimaerae*, which play a notable role in Etruscan art; there is also a horseman followed by a bull. Similarly the opposite *tympanum* over the entrance-door shows a school of sea-serpents with long tails. One of them is carrying a young man through the gently rippling waves of the sea, with birds hovering above. There may be a secret religious symbolism concealed in these pictures, as can also be inferred from the two erotic scenes on the expanse of wall below. The intervention of the legendary figure of a bull-god with a human face, as an avenging (though relatively benevolent) higher power, may be taken as elevating it from the level of a merely erotic representation to that of some symbolism indicating its religious character. Among other ancient peoples, too, sexual symbols always carry a significance of death as well, birth and death being one and the same thing in chthonian (underworld) cults. Consequently among such ancient peoples, whose life was much more intimately steeped in the great rhythm of natural forces, erotic representations (especially in a religious context) are very common; moreover, obscenity was regarded as having a protective power.

It is indeed curiously disturbing to find a place of mourning decorated in the style of a place of sensual enjoyment. Yet there is something to admire in this grand denial of death by simply amal-

14. Achilles waiting in ambush for Troilus: fresco in the "Tomb of the Bull" (sixth century B.C.), necropolis of Tarquinia.
15. Wrestlers: fresco (middle of sixth century B.C.) in the "Tomb of the Augurs," necropolis of Tarquinia.

gamating it with life; and this is a characteristic feature of the Tyrrhenian people in their prime. The two rooms at the back of the Tomb of the Bull, where the bodies once lay, are the only ones which retain no indication of their purpose; for here again legendary animals chase each other across the narrow walls, as if to destroy with their lively uproar the austere silence of this underworld dwelling.

The religious significance of the wall-paintings in the Tomb of the Bull remains hidden from us; so does their secret connection with death and the other world, which must no doubt be there. But the pictures in another of the early mausoleums, the "Tomb of the Augurs," contain a clear allusion to the death-ritual; and in consequence its frescoes, which date from the second half of the sixth century B.C., constitute an exceedingly valuable testimony to this still largely inexplicable practice. Even in this case, it is true, we can hardly penetrate beyond the outer periphery of the realm dedicated to the mystery of death. The aura of primitive chthonian religion, rooted in the dark domain of the mother-goddess and dedicated, with bloody sacrifices, to the primeval spirit that creates all things and destroys all things, seems to cling still to these wall-paintings with their well-preserved, strong, dark colours. A stark and sensual realism of representation combines oppressively with the solemn, inscrutable symbolism of the hieratic gestures they portray.

The Tomb of the Augurs consists only of a single room. It has a whitewashed ceiling, divided as in other cases by a central beam, and decorated with red flowers. The rear wall is dominated by a large representation of a closed door in the T-shape characteristic of the Etruscans. The leaf of the door consists of two painted beams, one superimposed on the other in the form of a cross, which is decorated with large white nails, like the door-frame itself. This door presumably symbolises the gateway of the tomb and not, as has been suggested, the entry to the underworld. To the right and left stand two little human figures, set among tiny little trees: they are dressed alike, and their posture is the same. Over the white tunic of each

hangs a small dark mantle with red facings. One hand is outstretched in a solemn gesture, as if to knock on the door; with the other hand each figure hides his head. A black bird flaps past one of the men as he knocks, or prays: this is a mythological image which recurs frequently in the illustrations of this tomb.

On the side-walls curious scenes unroll, taken from the funeral games with which the Etruscans used to honour their dead. This custom probably evolved out of the dark obscurity of a primitive era of human sacrifice; and in it can be seen the origin of the Roman gladiatorial games, to which, however, in later times there clung none of the mystical horror of a sacrificial rite dedicated to the blood-thirsty inhabitants of the underworld.

A dominating role in the game played out by the figures on the side-walls of the tomb's interior is taken by Phersu, a masked demon with a pointed hat and short jacket. Featureless, merciless, like destiny itself, he throws his sling round the leg of a doomed victim, whose head is wrapped in a cloak, so that he beats the air in vain with his club as he tries to defend himself against the assaults of a savage dog. On the wall opposite, the same figure is shown in flight from a human shape more difficult to distinguish, moving as if in the measured steps of a dance. From this creature's name, Phersu, comes the Latin word *persona* (mask), which was itself, appropriately enough, to come later to indicate a person. An innocent descendant of Phersu is probably still to be found surviving today, in the Neapolitan "masque of Pulcinella."

Near the Phersu group there is to be seen a struggle in progress between two huge, naked wrestlers, grasping each other by the wrists and leaning over three bronze vessels, which are no doubt the prize of the contest. (Plate 15.) A man holding a raised crook, which may perhaps identify him as a priest, seems to be supervising them as referee: his name, Tefarath, is written beside him. On the same wall (the only one in the tomb whose paintings are almost perfectly preserved) there is also depicted a third group, which consists of a tall, bearded man with black curly hair, making a wide, sweeping gesture

at a young boy, who is carrying a folding stool. No doubt he is a spectator of the wrestling match. At his feet crouches a figure half-covered in a dark, hooded gown. This has been supposed to be a mourner, which for reasons of symmetry was put on the side wall instead of among the other mourners, where it should have been. Black birds swoop over the heads of all these figures, and still further enhance the atmosphere of solemn mystery which broods over all the pictures in this tomb.

The Tomb of the Augurs is the only one of the early period in which there is any allusion, even in veiled terms, to the mystery of death. In the whole series of the other tombs dating from about the same time, the atmosphere is, on the contrary, predominantly one of worldly gaiety, befitting the sumptuous houses of a people devoted to the sophisticated enjoyment of life.

There is, for instance, the two-roomed "Hunting and Fishing Tomb," whose paintings depict the pleasures of upper-class life among the Etruscans with attractive vigour and freshness. Over the doorway from the outer to the inner room appear two young men, riding back from the hunt on thoroughbred horses. A servant holds their dogs, which strain to chase after a hare in the undergrowth. Two other servants follow with a quantity of game on a pole. Plants, branches and bushes make up the landscape which frames the lively scene. On the side-walls of the ante-room there appears again the characteristic row of little trees, from which hang garlands, ribbons and some other objects that are not easy to distinguish and which produce an effect almost like the kind of maypole decorated with crackers and bows such as is to be seen today in Alpine countries. In the second room the landscape element is even more marked. It is almost as if one were greeted there with a faint flutter of innumerable wings belonging to whole swarms of red, blue and white water-birds winging their way over the blue-green waves of the sea round all four walls of the room. Dolphins and other fishes leap high out of the water, over which drift boats full of Etruscans fishing simultaneously with line and trident. On a rock stands a hunter

aiming his sling at a water-bird. A naked brown figure dives head first from a cliff into the sea. The whole scene is of the utmost vitality, with its vigorously gesticulating fishermen and huntsmen and its stylised animals whirling round the room in gay rhythm. Its brightness and lavish intricacy are strikingly reminiscent of pictures painted by children. (Plate 17.)

Above these representations of sport and pleasure, the triangular gable on the rear-wall depicts a formal banquet within the circle of the family—a subject which recurs constantly in these fresco paintings. Husband and wife, beautifully attired, lie together at dinner in loving companionship. Graceful, naked boys pour wine out of painted vessels and enliven the meal with music; young girls sit plaiting garlands at the foot of the couch.

The nearby "Tomb of the Lionesses" is wrongly so called, since the two animals depicted under the gable of the rear-wall in the single room, with speckled coats and huge udders, are in fact panthers—animals dedicated to Dionysus and also to Artemis, the mistress of the beasts in Asia Minor. The walls are entirely decorated with orgiastic scenes of festivity. The lowest panel of the walls again depicts the waves of the sea, embellished with dolphins and birds. The water is here perhaps a mystical element, symbolising the frontier between this world and the next, which can only be reached by crossing the sea; and suspended immediately above it, the luxurious scenes of revelry unfold. A huge ivy-clad *ampbora* dominates the middle of the rear-wall. Beside it stand young musicians playing a double flute and a lyre. A woman in costly flowing robes dances alone, in solemn, measured movement, while a fair-haired, naked youth and a girl whose sturdy figure shows through a diaphanous veil are caught in the sensuous rhythm of a dance, full of pent-up ferocity. Four figures, of colossal size by comparison, watch the exuberant spectacle half-lying down, two on each wall. The powerful treatment of their bodies betrays the Ionian influence. Like all male figures in Etruscan painting their skin is a ruddy brown, following a primitive Mediterranean tradition; whereas the women are

always shown with white skins, and often with fair hair too. Such tenacious loyalty to practices surviving from a past which for most other Mediterranean peoples had already receded into the unreality of legend, is one of the distinguishing marks of the Tyrrhenians; and so the Etruscan painters remain true to the last to the tradition which requires men to be depicted always with dark skins.

The colours in the *Tomba delle Leonesse* are still of an almost savage brilliance, juxtaposed in strong, shadowless contrasts. The fact that these frescoes in the houses of the dead were executed by artificial light, and intended for this effect, may perhaps have led to a coarsening of technique in comparison with the wall-paintings of the temples and houses; but still the forthrightness with which the artist's delight in colour here manifests itself has at least the charm of unaffected simplicity.

The oldest group of tomb-paintings at Tarquinia is still bound by the same archaic rigidity with which Egyptian art used to portray its figures flat on the wall in profile; a little later they are shown more in the round, after the Ionic model. At the beginning of the fifth century B.C., there is a change of astonishing suddenness. A new, almost frenzied rhythm begins to pulsate through the lovely, impassioned figures in these stirring scenes of dancing and feasting. The influence of Attic red-figure vase-painting in the classical style then displaces the Ionic. The principal debt to Greek models is one of form: the delicate, idealised outline of the head in perfect profile, but with the eye still always shown full; and the slender and graceful lines of the body. The individuality of Etruscan painting was first developed by contact with the Greeks; but it never sought to achieve the quiet, measured harmony of Greek art. The important thing to these Etruscans was vigour of movement: the visible expression of a wild, seething passion for life. In contrast to the more delicate colours of an earlier period, those of the paintings from the beginning of the fifth century B.C. are a blaze of brilliant intricacy. The highest perfection of painting in this period is perhaps achieved in the *Tomba del Triclinio* (Tomb of the Banqueting-Hall), where the

hand of a major artist is to be detected in scenes of overpowering vigour and marvellous draughtsmanship.

The orgiastic symphony of the banquet-scene is unfolded beneath a ceiling painted in a chequered pattern of colours. The chamber of the tomb is not large. On the rear-wall are to be seen the participants lying on sumptuous couches. Graceful boys and girls serve the men and women, who sit at little tables. Garlands hang over their heads from the roof. At their feet is a gay confusion of cats, dogs, pigeons, even hens, playing with each other, and giving to the sophisticated luxury of the banquet a touch of homely familiarity. Along the side-walls winds the intoxicated rout of dancers. The clothing of the girls, enveloping the swift movements of their limbs like a bright translucent cloud, is of a magical beauty. The transparent drapery which consists seemingly of veils studded with stars, reveals the seductive contours of each figure against the dark-red background of the mantles floating from their shoulders. The deepest and most expressive intensity is shown in the figure of a woman hurling herself into the dance with an impetuous ecstasy; her head thrown back in blind and utter abandonment to the intoxication of the dance, which has swept her off her feet like a whirlwind. The movements of the young men are more restrained. If only because they are in some cases accompanying themselves on flute or strings, theirs is necessarily a different rhythm: among them, one of the flute-players has become celebrated for his gracefulness. Here too the composition is divided by little trees which frame each separate figure.

There is no other tomb at Tarquinia that gives a more resplendent picture of Etruscan life at its most opulent. The refinement of a great culture is here reflected in combination with a deep, primitive lust for life. It is the final zenith of archaic and archaising art.

Almost as brilliant as the frescoes in the *Tomba del Triclinio*, though somewhat stiffer in the movements of the human figures, are the pictures of the "Tomb of the Leopards," which is so called from the two large feline beasts of prey adorning the *tympanum* of the rear-wall. Here again are shown garlanded couples lying on a comfortable

couch. The women are fair; they gesture gracefully in conversing with their companions. The men are brown-skinned; they lie at the table with the upper part of their bodies naked; and one of them is lifting his hand to show his wife some object in it, which might be an egg. In this case no women are taking part in the dance, which is performed exclusively by young musicians in white and dark-red mantles with brightly coloured edges. A dignified procession of men carrying musical instruments and dedicatory offerings stands in striking contrast to the exuberance of the scene of the banquet, (Plate 19.) Variations of the theme of the banquet appear in a series of other tombs from this period, and later it gradually becomes stereotyped. The joyful inner enthusiasm of the figures visibly diminishes. In the *Tomba della Pulcella*, dating from the middle of the fifth century B.C., the banqueters are still lying on sumptuous couches in costly attire, but their gestures have fallen into a certain monotony. The great spiritual change in the Etruscan people, which goes hand in hand with the downfall of its power, is here just beginning to become apparent.

It was the external blows of fate that first had a crippling effect on the creation of works of art. The brilliant development undergone by Greek art about the middle of the fifth century B.C. has left no reflection to vivify the conventional formality of Tyrrhenian painting, which was still in its archaising period during the second half of the fifth and first half of the fourth century B.C. The same immobility is also to be found in sculpture.

At the same time, however, a decisive change in the spiritual keynote of Etruscan pictures reaches its climax. The fiery lust for life is gradually extinguished: it goes out for ever. Its place is increasingly taken by a melancholy gravity which culminates in sombre fatalism, a leaning towards the sinister and terrible powers of the depths, whose mysteries attracted the Etruscans with an irresistible force. The expression of the human figures is severe, and even gloomy. There is a chill breath about the works of this period. Art is more and more characterised by an intensive preoccupation with the other





world, and the presentation of its themes is decisively changed.

On the threshold of this period stands the *Tomba del letto funebre* (Tomb of the Catafalque), where the pictures show a funeral ceremony. The central point is a sumptuous bed of gigantic dimensions, with two cushions lying on its coloured coverlet. On these rest two pointed caps like mitres, each of them encircled by the golden diadem of the dead. The dead couple is no longer shown revelling in the pleasures of the banquet, but only in this solemn symbolism; and round the couch is a crowd of figures praying and offering sacrificial gifts. It is possible, moreover, that the two mitres symbolise not the dead but the divine couple of the underworld, Mantus and Mania. So the picture is further of particular historical interest because it depicts a custom in which it may be possible to detect the origin of the peculiar Roman festival of the *lectisternium*, where again a sacrificial repast was presented to representations of the gods exposed to view on a couch.

Various kinds of funeral games are to be seen on the side-walls of the tomb, though these are severely damaged. The roof is chequered in red, blue and black. Over the painted central beam trail tendrils of ivy, which is very often used as a decorative motif in the tomb-paintings, along with that of the pomegranate (the fruit of the goddess of the underworld), on account of its simultaneous Dionysian and chthonian significance.

The *Tomba del letto funebre* is by many decades the latest work of importance among the painted tombs of Tarquinia so far discovered. Its frescoes are even more carefully and artistically executed than the others; its superb figures of a young man and his steed have a grace almost worthy of the Greeks.

But at the beginning of the fourth century B.C. Veii went up in flames at the hands of the Roman conquerors—a conflagration pregnant with disasters to follow. In the same century the bloody conflicts with Rome and the marauding Gauls made a steady drain on the life-blood of the Etruscan nation, hemmed, as it was, within a circle of its enemies. But this same century evoked yet one more

17. Banquet and fishing scene; "Hunting and Fishing Tomb" (sixth century B.C.), necropolis of Tarquinia.

astonishing impulse of creative power in the doomed nation. Just at the moment when the external apparatus of Etruscan power was breaking up, Etruscan art found its most vigorous expression. It is as if the thought—the intuition, rather—had struck this people in the innermost depths of its being, when it was faced with the very extinction of its own individuality, that one day only the silent language of its art would survive to speak of its greatness and its tragedy. There is a throb of passion, too, in this art of the late period; but it is no longer the passion of enthusiasm for life and pleasure; it is a sombre lust for death and annihilation, which is practically without parallel.

The brightly decorated little house, which formerly welcomed the dead into the intimate friendliness of a home, now changes stage by stage into a wide dimly lit vault, with sinister scenes of the underworld unfolding themselves on its walls. The gay feast in the family circle of relatives and friends becomes a funeral repast in Hades presided over by the deities of the abyss. The throng of merrily dancing men and women is replaced by a melancholy procession of souls in Orcus, with terrifying demons lurking in the shadows. The Etruscan tendency towards crudity and extreme vigour of expression is intensified in these representations to a degree that becomes almost satanic.

The flowering of Greek pictorial art in the second half of the fifth century and the first half of the fourth century B.C., followed by the beginning of Hellenism, played an important part in the renaissance of Etruscan painting, both formally and technically. It is extraordinary that this influence becomes apparent so relatively late. In the second half of the fourth century, for the first time, the strong colours that were previously so sharply contrasted in Etruscan frescoes begin to soften and to merge in more delicate gradations, while the contours become more fluid. At the same date the Etruscan artist begins to show the human figure full face and to experiment more frequently in foreshortening of the body, treating it in a way which shows an increased knowledge of anatomy. The dignified lines of

Greek figures exercise a refining effect on Etruscan draughtsmanship, but even so it has not quite succeeded in shaking off its somewhat ponderous character.

Despite this fertilisation from Greek painting, the Etruscan spirit still predominates more than ever in the wall-paintings which survive from this period at Orvieto, Tarquinia and Vulci. They are disproportionately few in number, compared to the numerous frescoes of the archaic period. So far as survival goes, they were not blessed with good luck. At Tarquinia, fourth-century art is represented principally by the "Tomb of the Underworld." This was originally found by a French officer, who was so deplorably ignorant as to try to remove the frescoes from the walls. His outrageous conduct had as consequence not only the destruction of the greater part of a priceless masterpiece, but also the loss to scholarship of what seems to have been a complete representation of the Etruscan underworld, according to the changed conceptions of this period. The remains still surviving, which are steadily fading under the effects of atmosphere and humidity (like most of the Tyrrhenian tomb-frescoes, unfortunately), make it possible only to guess at the brilliance of what is lost.

Originally the chambers of this underground habitation, which are spacious and irregular in plan, belonged to two distinct tombs, which were later combined. In the older of the two, which has been dated to the second half of the fourth century B.C., the damage has spared only two fragments of the original wall-paintings. These two—a marvellous face of a young woman and a terrifying figure of a devil—nevertheless serve to crystallise everything that is essential in Etruscan art of the later period, overshadowed by the mystery of death.

The delicate charm of the girl's head, with its garland and its faintly shadowed outline, in its lonely brilliance on the damp-streaked wall of the tomb, has often been compared with the grace of Botticelli's pictures of women. The lovely figure is presumably reclining at a banquet. Her chestnut hair is fastened at the back in a

net; the firm profile is edged by a loose lock of hair; round her neck lie heavy gold chains. The hair-style and the contours of the head are reminiscent of Attic vase-painting of the late fifth century, but the expression of the face is wholly Etruscan in its melancholy, in the bitter line about the full, sensual lips, in the suppressed wildness of the sombre gaze. And purely Etruscan, too, is the creature of darkness confronting the girl's delicate beauty.

This figure is the Tyrrhenian Charu, the herald and messenger of death, the escort of souls embarked on their last journey. He brandishes a hammer as a symbol of power, like the scythe which Death menacingly carries in mediaeval representations. Yet this Charu has little resemblance to the morose ferryman of the Greek Hades. He is a savage executioner, the monstrous product of an imagination intoxicated by fear. On his skin are greenish patches of decay; his eye gleams red above a nose resembling a vulture's beak; pointed animal ears project out of his serpentine hair. Powerful wings flap round him and frothing snakes hiss round his shoulders. The Etruscan underworld, where such creatures lurk, is no longer a paradise of pleasure, but an abode of retribution and terror.

The first and second tombs are connected by a small passage-room. This too was painted, though undoubtedly by a later hand than that which decorated the older habitation of the dead. The Etruscan tendency towards the horrific and grotesque is here exemplified in the scene of Polyphemus blinded by Odysseus. The shapeless body of the giant, with its clumsy head and monstrous ears, its grinning maw and dishevelled hair, lies in a half-reclining position. The monster's right hand is grasping the stake which has been plunged into his single eye by Odysseus, whose face is practically obliterated.

The spacious chamber next door, its opening guarded by two dancing figures in relief armed with snakes, still retains even today something of that gloomy solemnity of atmosphere which must once have made it seem something like a pagan prototype of the mediaeval Etruscan churches, with their gruesome pictures of hell. The legends

and figures of the Greeks' underworld are here curiously transplanted into an Etruscan version, though its abyss filled with demons, snakes and ghosts has nothing in common with the pallid shadows that populated the Greek Hades.

Here reigns in sombre majesty the royal couple of the underworld, now known as Aita and Persephone. The sinister throng of hissing snakes round the goddess's pale forehead gives her haughty head an appearance of fearful beauty. Her husband wears a helmet made of a wolf's head with wide-open jaws. The authoritative gesture of his outstretched arm, and the magisterial sternness of his profile, have a melancholy grandeur and strength which are reminiscent of Michelangelo. In front of these deities of the abyss stands Geryon, the three-faced demon-god created by primitive Greece and also worshipped by the Etruscans, with his armour and shield.

Practically nothing is left of these pictures of the Chthonians' secret kingdom of the underworld. Only here and there protrudes a desolate rock out of the misty twilight, where hideous reptiles coil, to give a glimpse of the horrors of the Etruscan underworld, which owes so much to Orphic conceptions and was the precursor of the Christian hell.

Among the few surviving figures are two demons, both handsome and youthful. Huge birds of prey with their wings mark out one as a supernatural figure, while the other appears to be simply a graceful, naked youth. Both are occupied in preparations for a banquet, at a table loaded with articles of pottery.

The heroes of Greek legend are also to be found in the Etruscan world of shadows. Theseus and Pirithous, who presumed to carry off the goddess of the underworld, are here held prisoner. They are guarded by Tuchulcha, the winged vulture-demon, with two great asses' ears sticking out of his snake-like hair. Threateningly he brandishes a huge snake over Theseus, who has collapsed in cowed despair.

Elsewhere in the chamber of the tomb can be seen the figures of Agamemnon and Tiresias. The prophet stands in front of the fair-

haired Greek with his head half-concealed, sunk deep in thought. In place of the decorated green trees among the cheerful fields of dancers in the earlier tombs, here stands only a withered skeleton of a tree with a crown of tiny spectral figures swarming about its branches in uncanny agitation. Here again Greek mythology is curiously interfused with the weird Etruscan underworld.

At the beginning of the third century B.C. the old royal capital of Tarchuna began to be transformed into the Roman provincial town of Tarquinia; and the course of this century also saw the extinction of the impulse of Tyrrhenian painting, which sank little by little to the level of an indifferently practised handicraft. The predominant themes of most of the later tomb-paintings are allegories of death, final partings, troops of white-clad souls escorted by demons, and the horrors of the underworld.

The *Tomba degli scudi* (Tomb of Shields) in the necropolis of Tarquinia is an example of the decline of Etruscan painting in this last period. It is almost a house in layout and size, with its wide *atrium* and its three connecting rooms, between which openings like windows are cut through. The walls of the *atrium* are painted throughout in the familiar lustreless colours. Besides the decorative *motifs*, there are numerous pictures and inscriptions between and above the openings of the windows and doors. Two winged demons sit in state as heralds of death: one is carrying a hammer in his hand, the other writing at a table. The other surviving frescoes show two married couples at a banquet. But what a gulf divides these pictures from the scenes of gay and gracious intimacy in the earlier tombs! The wife now no longer reclines leaning against her husband on the ceremonial couch, but sits upright at his feet. A melancholy gravity speaks out of the husband's features, which show no trace any longer of the radiant joy in life that had once been. The only noteworthy thing about these crude and feebly executed frescoes is the vitality of the faces, which carry a reflection of the high level of Etruscan portraiture at this date. (Plate 20.)

Towards the end of the second century B.C., when Etruscan art

and culture finally merge into the Roman, the very custom of painting tombs lapsed into oblivion. The latest tomb decorated with frescoes that has so far been discovered at Tarquinia is the *Tomba del Tifone* (Tomb of the Typhon), dating from the end of the second century B.C.

A long, steep staircase leads down into it. All the character of a dwelling-place has vanished. The single large, low chamber, with its flat ceilings supported on a stout four-square pillar, is more like the crypt of a mediaeval church. (Etruscan tombs of the later period were in fact frequently incorporated into the building of mediaeval houses of God.) Three steps hewn out of the rock, one above the other, run round the walls, to serve as a resting-place for the sarcophagus (except when the sarcophagus was dispensed with entirely, in which case the bodies were put in the hollows carved out of the steps and covered over with stone lids. A few of these lids are still to be found in the vault today, with representations of the dead outstretched on them, asleep). A squat stone altar in the middle of the chamber serves to reinforce the impression of a crypt. The wall-paintings are badly damaged. There remains today only a solemn procession of white-clad figures making their way to the place of shadows, escorted by snake-haired demons. The essence of all that is best in Roman art can already be seen in the masterly composition of the procession; in the grave dignity of the expressive heads; in the impressive draping of the bright togas. This funeral gathering is reminiscent of Roman marble reliefs showing, for instance, a stately senatorial procession. This work by an unknown but important painter foreshadows something of the perfection which the same type of representation was later to achieve on Augustus' *Ara Pacis*.

Besides this fragment of wall-painting, three weird figures have survived on the sides of the central column. Two are repetitions of the winged, snake-tailed figure of Typhon, who supports the painted cornice of the column like a caryatid; the third creature is one of those attractively melancholy Etruscan *Lasae*, which might well be pre-

cursors of the Christian angel-figures with their long wings. The naked body of the Typhon recalls the giants on the altar at Pergamum: it is a wonderful example of skilful detail in portraying anatomical structure and the play of muscles. When, 1600 years later, the creative power of what had once been Tyrrhenian soil reawoke in the Renaissance, Luca Signorelli was to paint his damned souls with just such bodies, in the cathedral of Orvieto.

The era of the Tyrrhenian people is over: that is clear from the Tomb of the Typhon, with its inscriptions in Latin instead of Etruscan, and the style of its frescoes full of the Roman spirit. A last glimmer of the happy archaic past is preserved in the *motif* of stylised waves and leaping dolphins, which decorate the walls of this gloomy vault just as 500 years earlier they decorated the gay habitations of the dead. It is like a monument on the frontier between two worlds.

For many centuries the art and culture of the Etruscans had a formative and guiding influence on Rome in its youth. Rome's houses, tombs and temples—rather ponderous temples built of wood and terracotta on the Etruscan model, to which Pliny looked back with regret in contrast to the marble splendours of imperial Rome—all were decorated, in the early period of the eternal city, almost exclusively by Etruscan hands. Roman painting, too, above all was entirely an offshoot of the Etruscan.

As the triumphal progress of Hellenism brought Rome under its sway, the artistic and spiritual tradition of the Etruscans in Italy reached its term. But the Italian world owes them an imperishable debt and an invaluable heritage of creative talent, which has remained alive throughout thousands of years in what used to be Etruscan territory.

A faintly glowing vision of a lost life, rising out of the night of a thousand years; a spectral play of silent figures, whose ultimate thoughts remain impenetrable: such are the wall-paintings of the necropolis of Tarquinia. Every time one descends into the mysterious silence of these vaults, it is like plunging into a deeper level of

18. Silhouettes of dancers: fresco in the "Tomb of the Bacchantes" (sixth century B.C.), necropolis of Tarquinia.
19. "Tomb of the Leopards." From left to right: servant carrying a bowl, a musician playing a double-flute, a lyre-player: fresco (fifth century B.C.), necropolis of Tarquinia.





human consciousness, which was still accessible to the Tyrrhenians, but to the Romans no longer.

The tombs of Tarchuna, the stone figures of the dead Tyrrhenians on their sarcophagi, the treasures which accompanied them—all these are still to this day an embodiment of the essential nature of this lost city standing on the threshold of Italian history. The names of their mighty kings and priests are forgotten, and their sanctuaries have long fallen into ruins. Yet something of the blood of the Etruscan race still flows in the proud lines of many a peasant's profile, in the sombre glow of many a girl's features in Tarquinia today. Like strange, beautiful figures out of a painting, these women tread their measured way to the fountain in the evening, to fill their copper vessels with water. They have no inkling that in their faces there is a fresh realisation of other features that can never perish. They are those of the girl of the family of Velcha, from the Tomb of the Underworld.

20. Banquet of Larth Velcha and his wife, Velia Seintithi: fresco (third century B.C.) in the "Tomb of Shields," necropolis of Tarquinia.

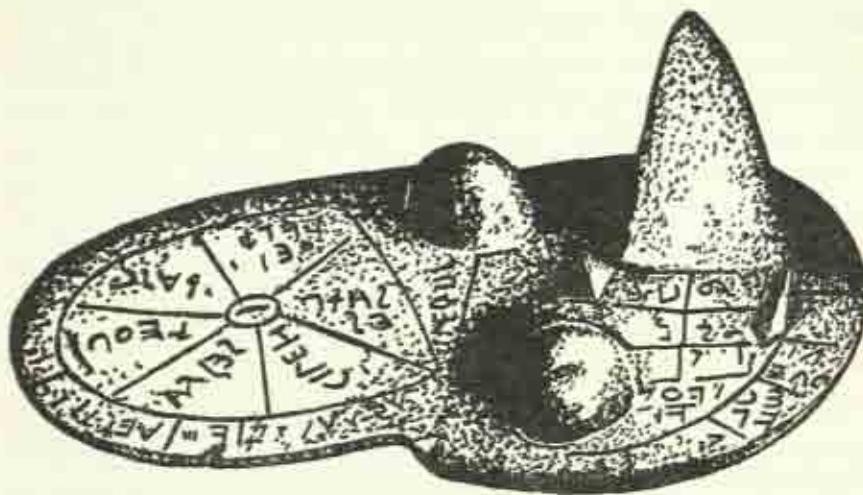
Chapter Five

THE RELIGION OF THE ETRUSCANS

THE only path to a deeper understanding of the Etruscan people, those last representatives still surviving into historical time of a primitive world that was already in process of vanishing for ever, is by examining the spiritual foundation beneath the externals of its life: in fact, the Tyrrhenian religion.

The sources from which a knowledge of the Tyrrhenians' religious customs and conceptions can be filled in are of many kinds, though they amount to no more than a trickle. It is known that the Etruscans kept family, state and ecclesiastical archives, like the Romans after them; that from an early date these documentary records were combined with an oral tradition, no doubt in versified form; and that the whole was reduced to a learned system, known as the "Etruscan Discipline." This religious literature was repeatedly translated into Latin, and knowledge of it at Rome is authenticated well into the Middle Ages; but unfortunately it is now all lost. Our knowledge of its contents now rests more or less entirely on the observations, quotations and treatises which are to be found among the works of ancient writers. Tarquitius Priscus, for instance, tried his hand at the Etruscan discipline in verse; and Caecina, who came from Volterra of an old Tyrrhenian family, wrote on the study of lightning. The one important original document of indubitably ritual content—the mummy-cloth already referred to—is still undecipherable, like the long funerary texts in the tombs and on the sarcophagi; and they must remain so until the secret of the Etruscan language is unveiled. We have very important clues to the com-

position of the Tyrrhenian Olympus thanks to the find near Piacenza of a bronze liver, which was no doubt used by teachers at a priests' school to provide the requisite instruction in divination from the liver. It is divided up into compartments representing the universe, with the names of forty deities, each of which has a fixed province to himself. The mythological scenes on bronze mirrors, reliefs, gems, coins and vases, which are often accompanied, for clarification, by the names of the deities and beings of the underworld represented on them, also contain much important evidence;



3. *The bronze liver from Piacenza*

so do the tomb-frescoes. Finally, opportunities for comparative research are provided by the religion and ritual of the Romans, who took over substantial elements of the Tyrrhenian religion in their early period. From all these sources a comparatively large mass of material has been accumulated; but it is still full of gaps, as well as of contradictions. The fact is that, at the date from which most of the evidence and the documents derive, the fusion of Etruscan, Greek and oriental elements had gone so far that to disentangle the original Tyrrhenian worship and theology is bound to be extremely difficult.

There are many respects in which the religion and cults of the Etruscans remain obscure. But such knowledge as we have, and in particular the visible evidence of the extensive cities of the dead with their treasures, may enable us to conjure out a faint but not discordant note, like a distant echo, from this world of mystery dominated by its melancholy theme of the universal power of destiny. From the beginning the central point in Etruscan religious life is occupied by a belief in fate, a worship of the chthonian deities and the primitive forces which alike create and destroy. It is an ancestor-cult of the dead. Later on the names and legends of the Greek gods were partially taken over by the Etruscans, but only to serve the purpose of more or less pictorial figures or decorative themes. In reality the bright daylight of Olympus, resting on the presupposition of an abstract detachment from death, never dawned over this world, which remained rooted in the primitive, narrow earth-cult of the Mediterranean's pre-Indo-European period. To the Tyrrhenians the dead are not insubstantial shadows, as they are to Homer: they are more real and more powerful than the living, and their presence goes deep down into the people's being. Their immortality was originally conceived in a purely material form, and associated with the solidity and permanence of the tomb, which was to serve as an everlasting habitation and monument to the dead. The deprivation of all power in the underworld, which was a typical element in the Homeric religion, had not yet been accepted by the Etruscans: the Uranian conception, in fact, had not yet displaced the Tellurian.

Here is enshrined the innermost secret of the Etruscans' being—their greatness and at the same time their limitation. The Tyrrhenians were the last representatives in Europe of the primitive populations of the Aegean world. They never reached the level of consciousness on which the world of Greece and Rome, and later that of the West, came to repose. Against the new historic and creative forces which were awakening in Rome, they had nothing to set but the oriental fatalism of their dim conception of the universe; and thereby they were doomed to go under. For them the natural order

of things flowed not from spirit but from the elemental powers of nature. At heart they were caught in the spell of a Tellurian system where the powers of creation were also those of destruction, and death and life were one.

The existence of the individual, as well as of the nation in all its manifestations, was merely an integral part of the inexorable rhythm of this natural order. The state, law, justice, military organisation, town-planning, land-surveying—everything rested on a religious foundation. A transgression of earthly law was regarded also as an offence against divine law—a sacrilege, in fact; and it was punished as such. The punishment was at the same time a propitiation of the offended deity.

Everything was predestined in the Etruscan picture of the world. The creator had apportioned to the universe a total of exactly 12,000 years from its beginning. Every millennium was dominated by a sign of the zodiac. Heaven and earth were created in the first thousand years; the firmament in the second; the sea and all other waters in the third; the stars in the fourth; all living creatures short of man in the fifth; and finally man in the sixth. (Here again we find the same ancient Asiatic conceptions that are reflected in the Bible.) After the 6000 years of the creation, the created world was given a further 6000 to continue in existence.

The life of the individual was similarly divided into twelve periods of seven years each: here too the influence of Babylonian beliefs is evident. Up to his seventieth year, according to this doctrine, a man can influence his destiny by propitiatory rites. Thereafter he is at the mercy of his destiny. After his eighty-fourth year, his soul is regarded as severed from his body: he is a living corpse, to whom even the gods pay no further attention.

Just as inexorably, the continuance of the Tyrrhenian nation was fixed at ten cycles, whose duration varied. The end of each was announced by the gods through appropriate signs, such as natural disasters, epidemics or other exceptional occurrences. The first four cycles of the Etruscan era each lasted a hundred years; the next 123;

then followed two of 119 years. In the year 88 B.C., according to Plutarch, the end of the eighth cycle was proclaimed by the harsh blare of a sound like a trumpet; and Varro reports that in 44 B.C. a comet announced the expiry of the ninth. These clues show that the calculation of the Etruscan era began in the year 968 B.C.: that is to say, at a date consistent with the theory of an immigration beginning in the tenth century B.C.

Just as was the case in the first ten periods of a man's life, it was possible for the nation too to escape the operation of destiny up to the tenth cycle by propitiatory sacrifice; but the expiry of each cycle was sure to be a critical moment. The Romans inherited a good deal of these conceptions: for instance, under the influence of Tyrrhenian superstition, Augustus was later to inaugurate a great sacrificial ceremony of secular propitiation, to guarantee the spiritual renaissance of his empire.

The life-span of the Etruscan people in fact failed to outrun the time-limit which they had themselves set. Their tragic belief in destiny goes far to explain the latter-day Tyrrhenians' attitude of spiritual apathy. They regarded their own downfall as something predetermined and unalterable, against which it was pointless to resist.

We know almost nothing of the earliest cults of the Tyrrhenians, which no doubt preserved much of the fetishism of the Mediterranean stone and bronze ages—as witness their primitive idols of the oldest period. It may be accepted that the cult of water, plants and trees played a notable role. The traditions of the Etruscans' world of the gods unfortunately go back only to a date when Greek and Roman names for the deities had in many cases displaced the old Etruscan names. We have lost without a trace the original significance of the Tyrrhenian deities, whose foreign names were no doubt borrowed on the basis of a certain general similarity of function or appearance. Of the forty names which appear on the bronze liver from Piacenza, only seventeen are purely Etruscan. Of these, Tinia roughly corresponds to Jupiter, Fufluns to Bacchus, Turan to Venus,

Turms to Mercury, Tesan to Aurora, Sethlans to Vulcan. We know only the Roman form of the name of the nation's guardian deity, Voltumna, to whom was dedicated their great national shrine, the *Fanum Voltumnae*; and the same is true of their goddess of destiny, Nortia.

Numerous other gods are entirely unknown to us. Nor do we yet understand the significance of a whole series of supramundane figures whose names are known to us: Aminth (possibly identical with Amor), Colalp, Letham, Laran, etc. Nor can we answer the question, how far the Italians' world of the gods took over their names and ideas from the Etruscans. The Romans certainly adopted from the Tyrrhenians the concept of a divine trinity, a primitive religious inheritance from the prehistoric Mediterranean cultures. When each Etruscan town was founded, three temples, gates and streets were dedicated to the divine trinity of Tinia, Uni (Juno) and Menrva (Minerva). The heavenly trinity had an underworld counterpart, which has come down to us at Rome as Ceres, Liber and Libera—though these are deities of Greek origin.

Above the crowded congregation of Etruscan deities, under the leadership of Tinia, there reigned the "hidden ones," the nameless powers of destiny which might never be mentioned. They were the subject of a dark and secret lore, which was confined strictly to the initiated.

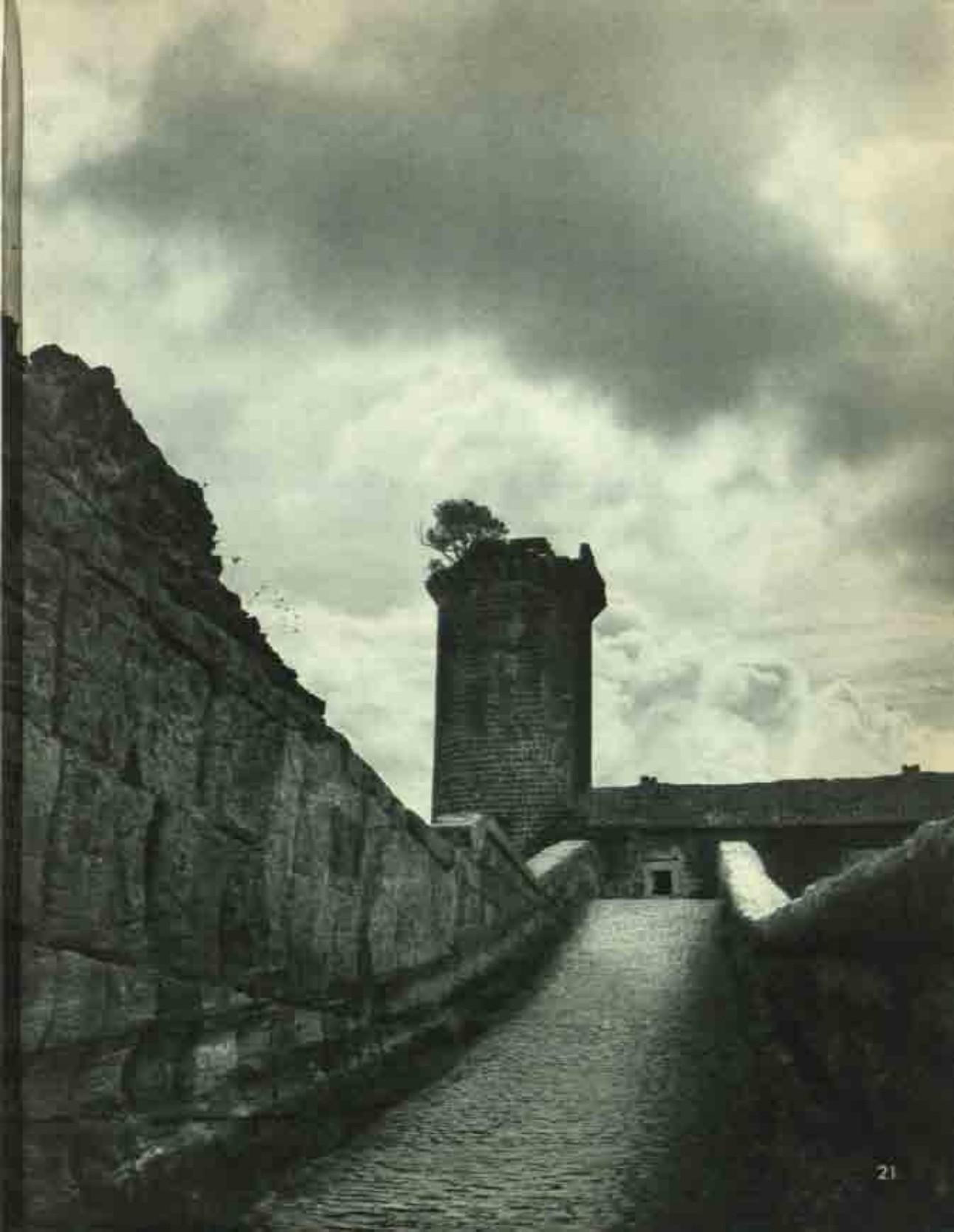
The world was further populated by a great number of celestial beings of lower rank, connected with people and places. The *Lasae*, usually shown in the company of higher deities, are known to us from a great many representations; so are the *Genii*, the Furies, the demons of the abyss and the deified souls of the departed (*aisna bintbu*). But we can have no clear conception of most of the secondary gods who emerge again and again both in the Etruscan tradition and in pictorial representations.

On the Tyrrhenians' theories of the other world we have little evidence beyond the silent witness of the cities of the dead. It is not clear whether the change in Etruscan ideas of life after death, which

becomes increasingly apparent by the fourth century B.C., has any connection with the intrusion of Orphic and Pythagorean doctrines from southern Italy, which were later to be resuscitated under imperial Rome. These doctrines, with their distinction between the righteous and the wicked, to whom they assigned rewards and punishments respectively in the other world, contained also the idea of redemption, and required abstinence and imposed strict regulations for purification. Their roots lay ultimately in the pre-Homeric world of ideas, and consequently they might well seem not essentially outlandish to the Etruscans. It is obvious, however, that the Tyrrhenian dualism is of a more primitive order than that of Orphism and Pythagoreanism; its affiliations are rather with that of Egypt, where ideas of the other world similarly underwent a sharp change in the Middle Kingdom, under the XIIth dynasty. From now on the belief increasingly prevailed that instead of the dead going to a blissful existence surrounded with all the pleasures of the world, as the old faith had taught, they were liable to strict trials and innumerable tribulations before they achieved this paradise; and that these menaces could be exorcised only by the various magic formulae which were contained in the Book of the Dead.

It was the same with the Etruscans. As the realm of the chthonian gods came increasingly to be regarded as a place of sorrow and terror in the later centuries of their existence as a nation, we find the same excessively developed formalism, the same anxious attachment to innumerable rites of exorcism, on the exact fulfilment of which salvation depended. It followed, too, that the redemption of the soul was sought not by the spiritual discipline practised by the Orphics during a man's lifetime—or so it seems at least—but by very complicated sacrifices offered to specified deities on behalf of the dead; and by these alone could the deification of the souls of the dead be achieved. The Hittites believed similarly in the possibility of a soul becoming divine; in their language the expression "his soul has become divine" is a synonym for death.

It could be, therefore, that here again ideas from Asia Minor were





operative among the Etruscans. But we know nothing for certain about the practice of these deification-rites which are represented as being so difficult, apart from a presumption that many elements from them survived in the apotheosis of the Roman Emperors; nor do we even know how far the Tyrrhenians believed in the immortality of the soul at all. Though there is a passage in the literary tradition where it is said that the "laws of mortality" could be abrogated under certain circumstances there depicted, even this is open to doubt. Originally survival after death, as it was already called, was certainly conceived as wholly material. The dead lived in their sepulchral homes and could enjoy and use the things that accompanied them. They were "the others" whose service was of such incomparable importance. The world of the living is in the last resort only a small part of that paramount, everlasting other world in which the dead rule.

In the heart of every Etruscan city was the *mundus*, which linked it to the underworld: a well-shaped vault located at the centre of the space dedicated to the city temple in the course of its foundation. Into the aperture of the *mundus* were thrown the first-fruits of all produce as a gift to the people of the underworld. On three days of the year (August 24th, October 5th, November 8th), the stone that closed it was removed; "the gate of the gods below was opened to allow the souls to climb up to the world above," in Varro's words; and he adds that these days were venerated and dedicated to Pluto and Proserpine.

The inner core of the whole of Etruscan life, then, was its preoccupation with the other world. It was the dark, fulminating fundamental harmony of all that gave joy to existence in the early period, when men went to meet death with garlands and dancing and the music of the flute, as if they were going to a banquet; it was the sombre voluptuousness of the later period, when the Etruscan people in its decline became more and more the victims of a conception of the eternal powers as cruel and pitiless; and its realm of death became populated with monsters born of a primitive horror of

22. The Argonauts landing on the coast of the Bebryces: a detail from the famous Ficoroni *littera* made at Rome by Novius Plautius at the end of the fourth century B.C.

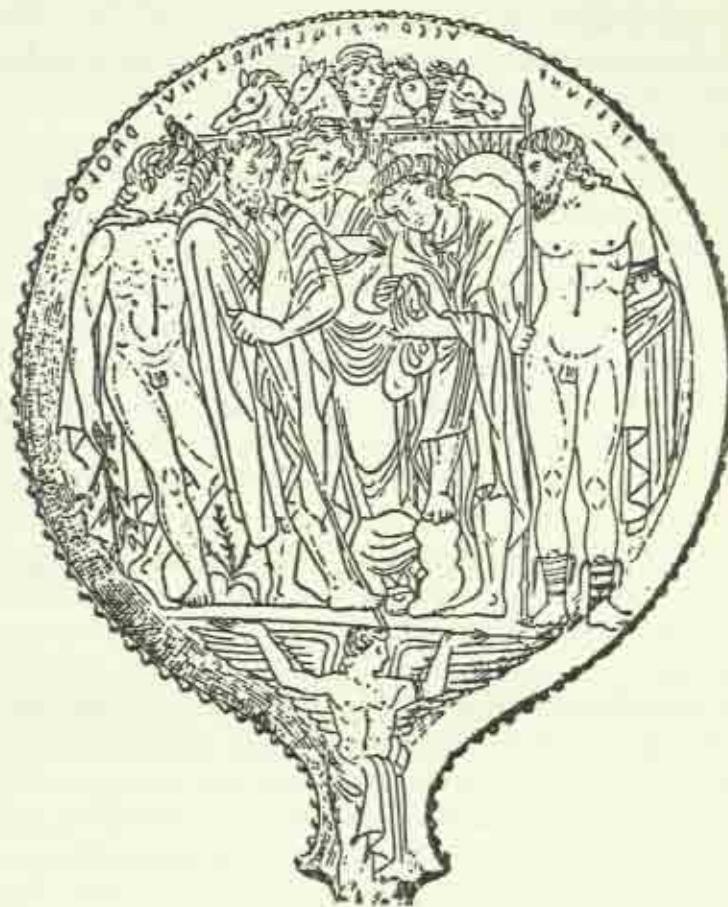
that other world, which had long been known to it, but in happier times had been forgotten. These demons of the Etruscan underworld derive from the East, from the cultural orbit of Babylon. Nergal with his sword, who was the Chaldaean god of death and destruction, and Labartu with his talons like a bird of prey and a snake brandished in either hand, may be regarded as cousins of Tuchulcha and Charu. Even the secret practices prescribed by the "Etruscan Discipline" are partly of Asiatic origin.

The books of the Etruscan Discipline were probably composed at a relatively early date in Tarchuna, the religious centre of the archaic period, where there was a large school for priests. As has been mentioned already, the legend records in poetic terms how, in the remote past, a peasant from Tarchuna turned up with his plough from a furrow the grey-haired son of the gods, Tages, who combined the face of a child with the wisdom of an old man. The whole Etruscan people gathered round this emissary of the gods, who possessed his wisdom not from heaven but from the bosom of the earth—another sure indication of the Tellurian element in Etruscan religion. They listened to his words, in which he revealed to them the law and the gods; and his words were written down in full by the *Lukumones*—or, in another version, by the founder of Tarchuna, Tarchon himself. But after the completion of his mission, Tages either disappeared again or died.

A great part of the Etruscan Discipline consists of the prophecies of Tages; another part consists of those of the nymph Vecui, who according to the legend revealed the art of divination from lightning and the regulations for fixing boundaries.

We do not know exactly the number of books which composed the Etruscan Discipline, but they were divided in any case into the *libri baruspicii*, containing the art of divination from entrails; the *libri fulgurales*, concerned with the study of lightning; and the *libri rituales*. The last dealt in their first part with the sacred regulations for founding a city, building a temple, and dividing land. The second part contained the principles of government, the constitution and the

regulations of justice and war; the third contained the doctrine of the other world, and the books of destiny; and finally the fourth expounded the significance of signs and wonders, and explained how men ought to behave in regard to them.



4. *Divination from entrails*

Roman tradition records that this Etruscan Discipline was preserved, on Augustus' orders, in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine at Rome, along with the Sibylline Books and those of Mago

from Carthage on agriculture. This evidence shows the importance of the role played by the Etruscan Discipline in Roman religious practice as well.

The list of contents of the sacred books of the Tyrrhenians is enough to show that no subject lay outside the scope of religion. Public and private life were equally embedded in the complex system of religious rules and regulations of this doctrine, which was evidently devoid of philosophy and required primarily an exact execution of all its rites and practices.

Particularly intricate was the process of divination from entrails (especially from the liver), which rested on religious practices derived from nearer Asia, themselves already over a thousand years old. They had probably been introduced from Babylon to eastern Asia Minor by the third millennium B.C.; and in the second they were probably taken over by the Hittites into central Asia Minor, whence the Tyrrhenians might have carried them on their way. The imitation liver from Piacenza, moreover, has counterparts among Babylonian and Hittite finds, so that here again everything points to Asia Minor as the origin of the Etruscans. The liver was the seat of the soul, according to Babylonian beliefs; and the Etruscans made it a symbol of the universe itself. The divisions marked on it correspond to the division of the universal order into provinces subordinated to the various deities. The examiners of the liver (*baruspices*) could tell directly from the appearance of the liver which god was communicating through it. A diseased liver indicated misfortune, an exceptionally large one indicated good fortune. At Rome too the *baruspices* enjoyed the highest reputation; in particular they were consulted regularly by the Roman Emperors. In this connection Pliny records that the animals which Augustus sacrificed on the day of his inauguration at Spoleto (principally sheep and calves) contained six double-sized livers among them, from which the *baruspex* predicted that Augustus would double the extent of his empire within a year. Julian the Apostate, again, had a corps of *baruspices* in his suite on his expedition to Persia.

The art of divination by lightning distinguished eleven kinds of lightning, as the Chaldaeans had also done; and these might come from sixteen different quarters of the sky, with correspondingly different effects. A council of twelve deities, six male and six female, was empowered to decide their significance, but only nine of the gods had the power to launch lightning themselves. Of these Tinia could launch three different kinds of lightning (*manubiae*). The first served as a warning; the second, which could only be launched after consultation with the other eleven gods, indicated danger; the third (*manubia peremptorium*), which could only be launched on the orders of the highest and most secret power, brought with it destruction and annihilation. The lightning was interpreted by the "lightning-observers" (*fulguriatores*). The method was for them to stand facing the south, so that they had eight quarters to the left and eight to the right. Flashes from the left promised good luck, those from the right brought bad luck. Apart from the direction of the lightning, its colour and the place it struck and its effects were also studied: for instance, Tinia's lightning was blood-red. If the lightning struck a temple or other sacred spot, that indicated that the gods to whom the place was sacred were angry. A man who was struck by lightning and unharmed was looked on as favoured by the gods. If a man of prominent position was struck, that meant fame for the whole of his family. The science of the *fulguriatores* also comprised ways of exorcising lightning and deflecting or attracting it onto enemies.

We have already mentioned the teaching contained in the *libri rituales* on the other world, on the destiny of the human race, and in particular of the Etruscan nation and of the individual. The rites for the foundation of a city, the establishment of a state, and of laws and justice and so on, will be examined elsewhere.

The fourth part of the *libri rituales* dealt with signs and wonders from the gods (*ostenta*). It explained how these should be understood and treated. The Etruscan augurs had to master this teaching in particular, and they had always to be expert in the art of prediction

from natural phenomena. They interpreted the flight of birds; they distinguished animals and trees that brought good and bad luck. A slight earthquake served them as forewarning of drought and famine; a severe one indicated political disturbance. The fall of a statue of Tinia-Jupiter indicated danger to the life of the priest or magistrate, and so on.

The study of *ostenta* was clearly an elaborate and far-ranging business, and one that contains many echoes of Babylonian ideas. In this connection there is an interesting description by Pliny of an illustration he found in these books of the Etruscan Discipline (probably alongside the text dealing with the flight of birds), which showed a number of birds, including some species that were already extinct in his day. From this evidence, the great antiquity of the books is obvious.

The mastery of the Etruscan Discipline required long and arduous study, for which schools of priests were established, especially at Tarchuna. Later there were schools for *haruspices* at Rome too, which lasted till the collapse of the Empire. The *haruspices*, the *fulguriatores* and the *augures* constituted three separate priestly castes.

In early times the supreme power of the priesthood undoubtedly belonged to the priest-king, who was actually identified with the deity in the ceremonies following a victory. It cannot be said with certainty whether or not, at a later date, the Tyrrhenians established a distinction between temporal and spiritual power, though much evidence points to it. In Rome again, at a later date, the King was simultaneously *Pontifex Maximus*; and Augustus, who was always concerned to revitalise ancient traditions, reintroduced the combination of these two exalted offices.

In view of the predominant position of religion among the Tyrrhenians, a very important role must have fallen to the priests. They alone could divine the will of the gods as expressed in secret signs; they alone could exorcise the menaces of the powers of darkness, or intercede between mortals and immortals, or carry out the manifold and exacting ceremonies of religion. Apart from sacrifices,

sacrificial banquets, prayers and invocations, the conduct of ritual also comprised dancing, music, processions and funeral games. At *hostiae consultatoria* animals were killed, so that predictions could be made from their intestines; at *hostiae animales* the life of the victim was offered as an expiation and a substitute for the life and soul of man. Human sacrifices were also practised among the Tyrrhenians within the historical period: originally they certainly played an important role in the chthonian cult.

The priestly castes were not only composed of the members of noble families: they were open to anyone of free birth. The costume of a priest, as it comes down to us in a few representations on monuments, consisted essentially of a high, pointed cap; a crook (such as is still the symbol of high spiritual rank in the Christian hierarchy); and a fur cloak fastened by a clasp.

The religious conceptions of the Italians were deeply penetrated—probably much more deeply than modern scholarship will allow—with Etruscan ideology. Rome embodied the ancient Mediterranean heritage which it took over from the Tyrrhenians in the foundation of its new order. Rome's greatness rested not least on this facility for taking over other people's traditions and penetrating them with its own personality, to give them new form. That is exactly how Rome inherited the legacy of an older world which came down from the Etruscans, and transformed it in taking it over. Rome was founded in accordance with the sacred rites of the Etruscans; it inherited from the Tyrrhenians its earliest temples and sacred pictures, the notion of the *sacrarium*, the ceremony of expiatory sacrifice, and innumerable rules of worship. Both the civil calendar, with its division of the year into *kalends*, *nones* and *ides* (in Etruscan, *itus*), and the religious calendar were in all probability introduced by the Tyrrhenians. Through their agency, in other words, Rome acquired the entire structure of a highly developed religion to take the place of an ancient, primitive nature-cult. Subordination to the religious order and scrupulous execution of the will of the gods, as manifested in multifarious natural signs, were in the eyes of the Romans too the

foundation of their prosperity. They also believed in destiny, though in a different sense from the Etruscans; and therein can be seen the profoundest difference between the two peoples.

The Romans did not feel themselves to be the victims of an inexorable power of destiny; they were conscious rather of the call of fate. Their function was to understand the dictates of destiny and to carry them out; to this end they made use of Etruscan practices to explain the divine signs; and so to fulfil the mission of world-leadership assigned to them by the gods. As numerous examples make clear again and again, the Romans' will to power rested entirely on their belief in a predestination from heaven to create a higher order of things. This is clearly expressed in Virgil's verse about the vocation of the Romans to world-power. Tradition is equally clear about the conviction that the greatness of Rome depended directly on the exact fulfilment of the dictates of destiny, the neglect of which would bring a fearful retribution. For instance, the ultimate defeat of Veii could only be interpreted as a response to the behest of the gods. The disaster of the Gauls, which came near to annihilating Rome, was on the contrary brought about by neglecting the heavenly voice which warned them that their enemy was near at hand.

The whole significance of the Etruscan religion for the spiritual formation of the Roman state and the creation of the Roman view of the world, as well as its consequent effect on the whole of Italy which lasted well into the Middle Ages, is still not even approximately clarified. But it is certain that Tarchuna was once the centre of religious life to the Tyrrhenians, and the point of origin of those religious forces which had a decisive influence on the development of Italy, and consequently of the West.

Chapter Six

VULCI : GLORY AND DECLINE

VELCHA, which the Romans called Vulci, was the youngest of the capitals on the Etruscan coast. It grew rapidly into a wealthy city of large-scale merchants, and its aristocracy was hungry for power. Its foundation probably does not date back beyond the seventh century B.C. Consequently Vulci was less hidebound by tradition and more accessible to the new currents of political and spiritual influence than the older towns. The ruling class strove to disrupt the age-old system of priest-kingship, with its myth-based regulations, in favour of an oligarchical type of republicanism; and their restless ambition sparked a flame of revolution which fatally disintegrated the structure of the Tyrrhenian world, whose essential character still had its roots in the lost civilisation of the Aegean and Asia Minor.

The revolutionary movement of the brothers Vipinas of Vulci, at the end of the sixth century B.C., may be regarded as a spiritual prelude to the dissolution of the Tyrrhenian state. It led to the downfall of the priest-kingship at Vulci, and indirectly also further afield (for instance, at Rome and in most of the other Etruscan city-states), in favour of a system of oligarchy. To Vulci there thus fell a special role, and a disastrous one, in the development of the Etruscan tragedy. It was in a sense almost a divine retribution that it should have been Vulci in particular, of all others, which was later to be so totally obliterated from the face of the earth, so completely forgotten without a trace. The site once covered by this rich and brilliant city is today no more than the melancholy symbol of the downfall of a once powerful and vigorous nation.

What used to be fertile, cultivated soil, surrounding a populous town, is now a scorched and barren plateau, stretching out to the blue shadows of the hills on the skyline, devoid of vegetation. Only on the edge of this desolate waste does life survive, where the plain slopes up into a ridge a few miles short of the sea-coast. Here red trunks of cork-trees hem in the pale golden fields of wheat; a low eminence is crowned by the little village of Montalto di Castro; the paths are grazed by cows, with gleaming flanks and graceful horns curved in the shape of sickles. But a little way beyond begins an infinity of desolation and silence. The villagers avoid this expanse of fever-ridden soil, which malaria has turned from a blessing into a curse during the downfall of Etruscan power.

In spring the countryside has the melancholy magic of moorland, but the summer there is a terrible season. The white-hot furnace of the sun scorches all life from it. Only thistles defy the heat—a sinister, prickly growth tricked out with flowering clusters of flaming yellow and dark violet. The heat-haze veils the sky as if with tenuous spiders' webs; the cracked earth thirsts for water, in despair.

Like almost all the Tyrrhenian coastal states, whose inhabitants usually built only their harbours on the sea at a distance from their own homes, Vulci stood about twelve miles inland. To it the sea was no more than a silver gleam on the horizon. After the final destruction of the already dying town by the Saracens, it was not long before the silence of the malarial swamp swallowed up all recollection of it. No new settlement grew up over the ruins of Vulci, and even its name was forgotten. It was only a little more than a century ago that the necropolis was rediscovered by chance, and the splendour of the tombs made possible a reconstruction of the appearance of the vanished city. On the site itself naturally there were only a few remains from Roman times. But between the city of the living and the city of the dead there still survived one single work of architecture, which stands to this day as a monument of a vanished world. This is the ancient bridge of Vulci.

The way to it is long and tiring. The landscape advances and

recedes mysteriously as you approach it, to the accompaniment of no living sound over the dead earth except only the hypnotic song of the cicada. The desolation oppresses the heart with an awareness of the inexorable flux of time.

Then suddenly the scenery shifts. How mysteriously the ancient Etruscan landscape changes its appearance from one moment to another! Without any transition there opens up a deep gash in the level surface, at the bottom of which flows a green torrent down a bed of black volcanic rock—the Fiora. Clusters of *macchia* proliferate over the deep folds of the rock, which has a silvery gleam like damp asphalt. In the summer there is little water in the stream, and it trickles sluggishly to the sea. At its deepest parts trout lie dozing in the clear, tepid water—almost unafraid of man, so little have they seen of him.

Across this dream-woven desolation, in the heart of the plain of Vulci, rises the steep arch of the Etruscan bridge, up to a height of a hundred feet. Thousands of years ago it connected the town with its necropolis. Today, with Vulci vanished and all life long since gone from the lonely banks of the gorge, it stands as if in empty space above the precipice, a tragic absurdity. Its two powerful columns, made of large and carefully cut stones, still rise out of the depths unbroken and intact, effortlessly supporting the weight of the bridge's steep arch. Water that once trickled from a Roman aqueduct—though there is no longer a trace to be seen of it—has covered its sides with stalactites like faded jewels. The superstructure was replaced by the Romans. (Plate 21.)

Almost all the basic elements in Roman architecture, including especially the art of building arches and vaults, were inherited from the Tyrrhenians. The endless series of more and more ambitious bridges that were to be erected by future generations of Romans are all foreshadowed in the sturdy vigour of this Etruscan bridge. It towers out of the mists of a half-mythical past as a proud memorial of Tyrrhenian craftsmanship in the world of today.

Just as the last memory of the city of the living survives embodied

in the isolated bridge of Vulci, so another gigantic, enigmatic monument is preserved in the city of the dead—the so-called *Cucumella*. The irregular mound-shape of the *Cucumella*, much altered by the passage of time, is the only survivor of the rows upon rows of round tumuli which once, as elsewhere, distinguished Vulci's city of the dead. There has been no systematic excavation to make possible a reconstruction of its lost appearance, as was done at Caere. Thousands of underground chamber-tombs were opened, however; and their precious furnishings, which consisted chiefly of magnificent bronze articles in great quantity, were carried off before filling them in again. The identification of the *Cucumella* was no easy task. Its huge dimensions and the peculiarity of its layout suggested a structure designed to serve for funeral ceremonies rather than a tomb. On the other hand, accounts like Pliny's of the monument of King Porsenna of Clusium testify that the mausoleums of Etruscan rulers were often of gigantic size.

Whatever the *Cucumella* may be, it certainly embodies in the most impressive manner the heart of the Etruscans' worship of the dead. The sense of mystical union with mother earth, whose womb gives all things life and swallows them up again, can still be felt here in all its demonic force. The circular shape of the universe was chosen as the architectural medium of expressing their conception of the world; and the *Cucumella* thus has a trebly circular construction. The passage of thousands of years has obliterated its contours, and the landscape has absorbed it into a wilderness of withered grass and stunted shrubbery and occasional trees overgrown in a tangle of ivy; but from the top of the hillock its curious conformation can still be recognised. It is as if a circular wall had been built immediately round the original tumulus, mounted like the tombs of Caere on a base made of large, close-packed stone blocks, more than 220 yards in circumference. But the huge mound does not curve over into a dome: instead it supports a kind of walled terrace superimposed on its summit. Its outer slopes are interrupted by extensive terraces of stone at irregular intervals, with steps leading up to them; and one of

them contains niches, where probably statues once stood. Through the interior of the mound runs a labyrinth on several levels, emerging here and there with dark, gaping outlets into the open air or onto the terraces. It is depressing to clamber down these tunnels, so pointlessly they seem to run into and out of each other. They only intensify the mysterious air of gloom that surrounds this monument, rising out of the abandoned plain of Vulci in a massive assertion of strength whose effect is inescapable. What solemn, ghastly rites were transacted in this edifice dedicated to the chthonian deities? What purpose was served by the bewildering confusion of the labyrinth? Is there perhaps still buried in it a king's tomb crammed with still unrifled treasures? Or was the mound simply a huge platform for a sacrificial altar, dedicated to the gods and demons of the dark, and to the bloodthirsty souls of the departed?

For us the attitude to life of a people which constructs such buildings for the service of its dead is beyond the reach of any real understanding. We are the creatures of a spiritually different, more awakened humanity; and we have paid for our development by the loss of that susceptibility to magic, that immediate sense of unity with the elemental powers which men once enjoyed. What we keep suppressed deep down in the abysses of the unconscious was for the Tyrrhenians a reality of a second kind, full of divine and demonic figures, palpably to be felt. Looking at the *Cucumella*, one can feel this fact, not without a tremor of awe.

The territory of Vulci now belongs to the princely family of Torlonia, who have a large collection of finds from the city of the dead. The Torlonia Museum at Rome in particular, although it is in a bad state of neglect and now unfortunately almost impossible to visit, contains one most remarkable piece: this is the fresco removed from the walls of the "François Tomb," discovered in 1857, which is of the highest artistic and historical importance. The monument dates from about the middle of the fourth century B.C., and consists of a large central chamber with seven smaller cells opening out of it. The walls of the main chamber were decorated with scenes of Greek

mythology on the left of the entrance, while on the right are represented events from the history of Vulci centring on the figures of the Vipinas brothers. It is the only example so far known of the use of a historical theme in Etruscan tomb-painting. These figures, which date from the period of the last fine flowering of Etruscan art that has already been described, are probably the most perfect achievement of Tyrrhenian painting. The rigidity of archaic art has now been finally overcome: the figures move with a lively plasticity; the naked muscular bodies of the men in their vigorous postures, which might well be described as acrobatic; and the inspired realism of the heads—all are reminiscent of the masters of the Tuscan Renaissance. The vast composition of these vivid scenes, and the delicacy of the subdued (but by no means lifeless) colours, and the powerful draughtsmanship, all combine to produce a harmony of the greatest aesthetic charm. There are certain flaws of perspective and other defects, but these do not detract from the impression that here we have the masterpiece of an artistic personality of the highest skill coupled with a passionate temperament.

Like almost all pictorial art from the period of the Etruscans' political decline, the pictures from the François Tomb are grim and gloomy in content. They reflect the depressing atmosphere of continual struggle in which Etruria bled away its vital strength in the closing years of the fourth century.

The principal scene chosen from Greek mythology was the sacrifice of the Trojan prisoners by Achilles. It is certainly no accident that this gruesome scene of sacrifice, which is so uncharacteristic of the Greeks and in which the inner nature of pre-Homeric religion breaks through so unmistakably, is one that is often represented in the funerary art of the Tyrrhenians. Here again there comes out unwittingly the spiritual submission of the Etruscans to that older, more primitive world of the Mediterranean peoples, whose deities had subsequently been displaced by the brilliant Olympians.

Despite the Greek origin of the myth, this sacrificial scene is given a distinctively Etruscan character by the addition of figures from the

underworld, which are typically Tyrthenian and alien to the Greeks. The central point of the picture is occupied by Achilles, who is leaning over a half-fallen prisoner to deliver the *coup de grâce* with his sword. Behind the dying Trojan, the implacable Charu is already waiting; without his wings this time, but readily identifiable by his hammer, by his hook-nosed, red-eyed grinning face, and by the pale green colour of his putrefying skin. Beside him stands Vanth, a beautiful female demon of death with wide-spreading wings, which shelter in their shadow the blurred and ghostly figure of Patroclus (identified by the superscription: *binthial patruckles*, i.e. "soul" or "shadow" of Patroclus), in whose honour the sacrifice is being made. Other Greek warriors are dragging forward two more naked Trojans, whose downcast faces bear a tragic expression of resignation to their fate.

There is a similar crudity about the other part of the wall-paintings, which has for its subject the liberation of Caile Vipinas from his captivity at Rome. The revolutionary activities of the Vipinas brothers from Vulci have come down to us from various sources, such as the writings of Varro and Tacitus, as well as in the surviving fragment of a speech by the Emperor Claudius. Although these records are full of gaps and in part mutually contradictory, like almost everything else we know of Etruscan history, once they are disentangled from their accretions of legend they yield a fairly clear picture of the fatal upheavals of domestic politics at the end of the sixth century B.C.

The family of Vipinas seems to have been one of the most aristocratic of Vulci, and their influence was further reinforced by an armed following under the leadership of a determined adventurer named Macstrna (a name which may simply signify *condottiere* in Etruscan). Two ambitious brothers, Caile and Aule Vipinas, were the protagonists of the aristocratic party's lust for power. More and more adherents joined them, and with their armed bands they soon provoked serious unrest within the Tyrrhenian federation, the conservative elements in which rightly felt their orderly world, resting as

it did on age-old traditions, to be threatened by this rising of the young aristocrats. Some of the principal cities—Velsuna, Sovana and Rome—therefore formed a league and declared war on the Vipinas. At first fortune inclined against the revolutionary brothers: they suffered a defeat, in which Caile was taken prisoner. But in a second battle, known to legend as the "Battle of the Kings," Aule and Macstrna defeated the league and freed Caile. This was the foundation of the political predominance of the new movement. The royal family of the Tarchunie or Tarquins at Rome was overthrown in the course of these struggles: it even seems that Macstrna became for a short time king of Rome, and an attempt has been made to identify him with the legendary king Servius Tullius. The fact that it was Macstrna and not either of the Vipinas brothers who became the ruler of Rome probably points to a conflict within the revolutionary party itself. There is an allusion to this in a remarkable tradition recorded by Arnobius in his *Adversus Gentes*. According to his story Macstrna killed Aule Vipinas, and his head was then buried on the Capitol, which took its name (*caput auli*) from this event. Similarly the name of *Monte Celio* is said to preserve the memory of Caile Vipinas (Caelius in the Roman form).

Until the discovery of the François Tomb, the accounts of the rising of the Vipinas brothers were regarded as belonging more or less to the realm of legend; but since then scholars have been increasingly convinced of the historical reality of these events. In particular, the Italian Etruscologist Professor Pallottino has recently found, in the precinct of the so-called temple of Apollo at Veii, a potsherd dating from the end of the sixth century B.C. with a dedicatory inscription signed "Avile Vipiennas," which is fairly close to the name of Aule Vipinas. This seems to be yet another piece of evidence to show that the Etruscan revolutionaries were real historical figures.

On the large wall-painting from the François Tomb are shown the Vipinas brothers with a number of their followers, and their names are given: Laris Papathnas, Velznach, Macstrna and Marce

Camilnas. They are shown engaged in battle with the Romans, from whom Caile is being released: Macstrna is actually hacking through his fetters with a short-sword. The others are fighting in pairs. One of the fallen Romans, to judge by his name, which is Cneve Tarchunies Rumach, probably represents the Roman king of the house of Tarquinia. The Romans are clean-shaven, in contrast to the Etruscans, who are all bearded. Naturally the Romans are shown as the defeated side. The head of one of the dying warriors, transfixed by an Etruscan sword, has something of the grave, monumental beauty of the young men's heads painted by Michelangelo two thousand years later on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Blood flows freely, spurting in veritable torrents from the wounds. This introduces a note of primitive barbarity into the vigour of the battle-scenes, which is already violent enough without it. Compressed within the four walls of a small room, and reduced to the simplest terms, this representation of what must have been a historical event produces a highly dramatic, even spectacular effect.

It is from the darkness of this tomb that we see the doomed figures of the Etruscan past emerging for the first time in clear-cut outline, identified by name. On the basis of this discovery, one sector of Etruscan history, and not the least important one, begins to take clearer shape. It now becomes easier to understand the internal and external causes of the tragedy of the Etruscan people, hitherto known to us only from fragments of the Roman tradition, which was itself deliberately falsified to the detriment of Rome's enemies. The Tyrrhenians themselves stand silent before us: their annals, which the Roman historians mention and cite as the *Tuscae historiae*, have been lost, as has already been mentioned; and apart from the clues yielded by the historical writings of other peoples, the only other light that can be cast on Etruscan history comes from deductions based on the results of archaeology. Thus thousands of minute fragments have to be put together to form a mosaic, which offers in general outline an admittedly incomplete but probably correct picture of the Etruscans' historical evolution. This picture of the rise and greatness and col-

lapse of the Tyrrhenian nation, shadowed in mystery and cast in dark and fiery colours, emerges with overwhelming force as one stands on the soil of Vulci, a site so pregnant with the past.

At the very threshold of Etruscan history we find that mighty stimulus of great peoples, the sea. It is as a seafaring people that the Tyrrhenians first enter the life of Italy; and it is with their appearance that Italy first begins to play a rôle in the Mediterranean. During the eighth century B.C. the Etruscans displaced the Sardinians, despite their commercial skill, from the sea which at that date was called after them, but which soon came to be known as the Tyrrhenian Sea after its new masters. The Etruscans may already have been experienced seafarers when they landed on the shores of Italy; or possibly they may have been prompted to the rapid development of a maritime trade by the enterprising spirit of a young people on finding unsuspected commercial opportunities opened to it by the new discovery of mineral wealth. These are questions which can only be answered when the riddle of their origin is solved. In any case, by the seventh century B.C. the Etruscans already had commercial relations abroad, and probably also had shipping lines which reached *via* Sardinia and Sicily to Carthage, Egypt, Greece and the Greek islands, even as far as Asia Minor. To the west, too, the commercial fleets of the Tyrrhenian coastal towns pushed out beyond the Balearic Islands and Spain, through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic, where they disputed possession of an unidentified island (perhaps Madeira) with the Carthaginians.

The Greeks and the Phoenicians were the Etruscans' great rivals in this competition for the mastery of the Mediterranean. The extension, which the Tyrrhenians undoubtedly planned, of their sphere of influence over Sicily and beyond to the east was blocked by the Greek colonial occupation of the Straits of Messina. The open struggle which later flared up between the two peoples for the control of the Mediterranean area was already anticipated in this earlier period by a continuous state of guerrilla warfare. Echoes of it are to be found in Greek legends, recording the terrible character of the Tyrrhenian

pirates. With the Carthaginians, on the other hand, the Tyrrhenians entered into a compact, since their establishment on Sardinia might otherwise have resulted in a dangerous threat to the Etruscan coastal area. After delimiting their respective areas of influence and interest, the two peoples concluded a naval agreement and a pact of friendship which lasted for centuries.

Hand-in-hand with the growth of Etruscan sea-power in the eighth-sixth centuries B.C., their period of expansion, there went a drive into the hinterland and southern Italy. From the big coastal towns Tyrrhenian colonists pushed their way into the sharply articulated territory of Tuscany, Latium and Umbria, with their wealth of forest and water; and without much struggle, thanks to their more powerful weapons, they conquered the semi-civilised tribes inhabiting these areas. Numerous towns were founded, great and small, frequently on sites already occupied by the indigenous peoples. Among the most important centres, which were hardly less old than the coastal capitals, were Volterra (*Velathri*), Veii (whose sovereignty later stretched up to the gates of Rome), and Camars (*Clusium*). The last may well have constituted an important bridgehead for the Etruscans' advance into northern Italy. Of the settlements established at greater or lesser distances round Lake Bolsena, the most important was Velsuna, which was probably identical with modern Orvieto. In the same neighbourhood was built the national shrine of the god Voltumna. The landmarks of their slow advance to the north are Perugia (the advanced post of the Etruscans in Umbria), Cortona, Arezzo and Fiesole, the last-named sites being, probably, foundations of the Volterrani. Eventually in the second half of the sixth century came the occupation of Felsina (later Bologna), which was already a fair-sized village of huts belonging to the Villanova culture, as well as a distributing centre for Italian trade with the north. From there the Po Valley was colonised and the Adriatic Sea was reached, where the harbour-towns of Adria, Spina, Ravenna and Rimini sprang up. In the western part of the Po Valley we know of Mantua, Parma and Modena (in Etruscan *Mutina*) as

Tyrrhenian foundations. In fact, however, the number of Etruscan settlements there was undoubtedly much greater. Tradition has it that northern Etruria, like Campagna, was organised in a federation of twelve cities, on the model of the original Tyrrhenian heartland.

The Tyrrhenian expansion to the south spread over Latium to the fertile territory of Campagna (Campania). Rome was founded as the centre of this territory, about the turn of the seventh-sixth centuries B.C., on the site of an existing Latin-Sabine settlement. With the exception of Kyme (Cumae) and Naples (with its islands), where the Greeks had forestalled them, the Etruscans conquered the whole coastal area down to the Gulf of Salerno, where again they came up against the Greeks. The most important city in the southern territory of the Tyrrhenians must have been Capua, a model settlement laid out in a geometrical pattern in strict conformity with Etruscan principles, intersected by straight roads at right angles. After subjugating the inhabitants (who were related to the Latins both in language and customs) the Etruscans undertook an extensive programme of agriculture. These vigorous seafarers then proved themselves also to be none the less skilled as farmers; and their rationalised methods of agricultural economy point to a long previous experience.

The link between Latium and Campania was formed by the ancient Italian settlement of Praeneste, situated on the edge of the Sabine hills. Praeneste had its intermediate position between north and south to thank for its development into a commercial centre of the first rank. Its "Oracle of Fortune" enjoyed a great reputation from an early date. The massive ruins of the sanctuary, corresponding in extent to the whole area of the modern village, and the sumptuous wealth of the luxuriously furnished Etruscan graves of Praeneste, still survive as evidence of the prosperity once enjoyed by the ancient town.

The impact of the rival efforts to expand on the part of the Etruscans and the Greeks was felt on land and sea alike. But for the Tyrrhenians, the whole of Italy would perhaps have become a

Greek colony. This danger was particularly acute towards the middle of the sixth century B.C., when a new wave of Greek colonists advanced to Spain and the Ligurian Sea. The Phocaeans, who had been left homeless by the Persian onslaught against the Greek city-states of Asia Minor, headed for Corsica at about this date. The coast of Corsica facing the mainland was still occupied by the Tyrrhenians, who produced wood, honey and wax from the vast forests.

The Greek immigration into Corsica was consequently tantamount to a serious inroad on the Etruscan empire, and it provided the first impulse which led to the outbreak of hostilities between the Tyrrhenians and the Greeks on a major scale. The pact with Carthage, which the Etruscans had already made—no doubt to offset the Ionian threat to the Tyrrhenian Sea—now proved to be very profitable. The Carthaginians were as much alarmed for their Sardinian possessions as their allies were for the Corsican colony. They sent out sixty ships, which combined with an Etruscan fleet of the same size to challenge the enemy off Alalia, the Greek foundation on Corsica. In Greek historical works this first international battle in the Mediterranean is counted as a Greek victory; but in reality the Ionians lost forty ships and found themselves compelled to evacuate Corsica.

By the middle of the sixth century B.C., after the victorious battle of Alalia, the Etruscan thalassocracy stood at the zenith of its power. It was in the great coastal cities of the Tyrrhenian Sea that the nation's heart beat: just as was the case with the Greeks, the city or *polis* was the kernel of cultural and political life. But the distinct individuality of the separate city-states prevented the Etruscan people from ever achieving a close political co-ordination. The mutual ties of the city-states were as loose as their sense of religious, racial and cultural unity was strong. Their confederation can perhaps best be compared with the German *Hanse*.

Once a year, in the spring, the leaders of the separate Etruscan tribal groups gathered at the temple of Voltumna, for a celebration

in honour of the guardian deity of the nation. This gathering had both a religious and a political character; it served also for a general discussion of questions confronting the Tyrrhenian people, especially questions of war. Declarations of war on the part of individual states, like treaties of peace, required the sanction of the federal assembly, which also nominated the supreme commander of their combined forces for joint campaigns. On special occasions, too, an extraordinary assembly could be convened.

All decisions taken in the temple of Voltumna were absolutely binding on the Etruscan city-states. Anyone who failed to keep them was automatically ostracised from the community: he could not count, for instance, on assistance in any operations of war which might be undertaken without the consent of the other member-states. In questions other than those of the two cardinal problems, peace and war, the federal principles allowed the individual states a rather wider freedom of decision, which suited the Etruscans' strongly developed sense of independence. Even the conclusion of pacts with other non-Etruscan tribes was left more or less to the private discretion of the individual cities.

Constitutions were doubtless originally monarchical throughout Etruria. The priest-king, whose power over life and death was symbolised by the lictors marching before him, with their axes for beheading and their rods for flagellation, ruled in unrestricted authority over both the religious and the political sphere. Possibly the kingship was hereditary in the early period. At a later date there is evidence that the kingship was held only for a year, the choice being made in turn from the representatives of the greatest and most ancient families. A well-armed and well-organised army formed the basis of the power of the head of state. The commanders came exclusively from the aristocratic ruling caste, on the basis of experience in battle; and their influence was consequently always on the increase. It was from their ranks that the Vipinas brothers came, with such disturbing consequences to the political equilibrium enjoyed in the sixth century, at home and abroad, by central and

southern Etruria. In the course of this social revolution the old monarchical regimes in most of the city-states were replaced by republican aristocracies. Where the king survived, as at Veii for example, his responsibilities were reduced to religious functions. The main characteristics of the new constitutions were the annual election of the senior officials of state with limited powers, the *zilath* (Latin *praetor*), and the permanent institution of the council of Elders. All state offices were naturally in the hands of the nobility.

The conflicts and upheavals which followed the revolution of



5. *The lictors' axe*

the Vipinas brothers had as an inevitable consequence the temporary enfeeblement of the Etruscan nation, whose enemies at once tried to exploit this lucky conjuncture. Rome in particular was rising rapidly to power, as a result of her key-position in control of shipping on the Tiber and her favourable situation between the Etruscan heart-land and their southern possessions; and there the anti-Etruscan party received a powerful impetus from the downfall of Cneve Tarchunie. But Rome too was still helpless at the mercy of diverse interests. She was under pressure from neighbouring Veii; and

Clusium also seems to have been interfering in her affairs—at any rate, tradition records that Porsenna, the powerful king of Camars, captured Rome and reinstated the Tarquinian family on the throne from which it had been expelled, doubtless only for a short time.

The anti-Etruscan movement among the Latin inhabitants of the Alban hills began to take more definite shape about this time, probably at the instigation of the Greeks, who were on the look-out for their opportunities from the south. The result was a battle near modern Ariccia, towards the end of the sixth century B.C., between the Tyrrhenians and the Latins, who were in revolt with the assistance of Aristodemus and his troops from Cumae. The battle ended with the defeat of the Etruscans. The victorious Latin cities then formed a league (in which Rome and Praeneste did not originally participate), and tried to drive the Etruscans back across the Tiber. When Rome eventually also joined this league, the Etruscans' supremacy in Latium was finally broken.

The secession of Latium was a severe blow for the Tyrrhenians, who now found their overland communications with the southern-most part of their empire destroyed. Apart from the economic consequences of this event, it entailed also a striking loss of prestige for the Etruscan confederation: their predominant position over the greater part of the Italian peninsula seemed for the first time to be seriously threatened. Command of the sea now became more than ever a question of burning importance for the Tyrrhenians, since Campania could in future be reached only by water. The result was a renewed conflict with the Greeks, whose advanced post of Cumae, driven into the flank of Etruscan territory, was a continual thorn in their flesh.

After the fall of Aristodemus, who had played such a decisive part in the struggle between Latium and the Tyrrhenians, the Etruscans decided in 474 B.C. that the appropriate moment had come to effect the capture of Cumae from the sea. This time they had no Carthaginian alliance to support them, since Carthage had already suffered a defeat at the hands of the Greeks in the struggle for

Sicily; but the Syracusans were quick to come to the aid of the defenders of Cumae. After a bloody naval battle, fate turned against the Tyrrhenians, and their fleet blockading Cumae's waters was almost totally destroyed. We find a recollection of this catastrophe preserved in one of Pindar's odes, which describes how in this battle "the flower of Tyrrhenian youth was hurled into the sea from their swift-faring ships, and Greece was rescued from the abyss of slavery." A dedicatory offering found at Olympia—the inscribed bronze helmet of Hiero of Syracuse—is also connected with the Greek victory in this battle.

With this defeat at Cumae, the Etruscan dream of supremacy in southern waters was at an end; and so too were all the plans they cherished for further expansion. Campania was now entirely cut off.

The great old coastal cities such as Caere, Tarchuna, etc., were the chief losers from the events described. They suffered a sharp recession in maritime trade, a diminution of their wealth, and a consequent loss of political and military power. Barely twenty years after their victory at Cumae, the Greeks were already able to risk an advance into the commercial nerve-centre of coastal Etruria, the metalliferous island of Elba, and to establish themselves there at several points; and this was also their opportunity for establishing strong-points on Corsica. The fact that the Tyrrhenians were no longer able to control these aggressive expeditions of their ancient hereditary enemy at sea shows how rapid was the decline of their power, which proved no longer adequate to defend successfully even their position on an island immediately opposite their own coast.

A new danger was soon added to the threat from the sea. This was a rising of the uncivilised Italian hill-tribes from the Abruzzi and the Apennines. These warrior-bands first moved northwards to attack the territory of Picenum, and then overran a large part of the Adriatic coast with its Etruscan colonies, probably even up to Ravenna. Latium too suffered severely under this invasion, and lost the whole area south of the Alban hills from Velletri to Terracina, which belonged to the Volsci. In the south, however, the hour had

struck for Etruscan Campania, which had been increasingly dependent on mercenary troops for its defence since its severance from direct contact with the mother country. These mercenaries had been recruited from the same tribal stock that now poured down over the fertile plains and the prosperous cities like an avalanche from the desolate valleys of the hills. Among them were the Sabellian tribes, which had served Tyrrhenians and Greeks alike as mercenaries for more than a century in their struggle for supremacy, and now saw in the enfeeblement of Etruscan power in Campania the critical moment to overrun this territory. To this end they marched down the valley of the Volturno on Capua. The Sabelli had already, however, entered into an understanding with their compatriots in the garrison of Capua, who betrayed their Etruscan commanders, opened the gates of the town by night, and took part with the attackers in a hideous bloodbath among the unsuspecting Tyrrhenians. With the fall of Capua in 430 B.C., the fate of the whole area was settled; for Capua was the heart of southern Etruria, and it passed in a relatively short time under the control of the Italian tribes. Even proud Cumae, which had defied the Etruscans for centuries, was overwhelmed by the savage onslaught of the barbarians. Only Naples and the islands of Ischia and Capri succeeded in holding out.

The forfeiture of such positions of strength which the fifth century B.C. brought upon the Etruscan empire also caused a severe displacement in the equilibrium of power in other areas that still remained untouched. Etruria found itself obliged to shift from maritime to inland trade; and consequently the north Etruscan towns, which dominated the communication-routes with the valley of the Po, rose to become the nerve-centres of the commercial life of the country, and hence of its cultural life as well. With the diminution of sea-traffic, the importance of the coastal cities also faded; an agrarian crisis set in, and malaria began gradually to depopulate the area. Clusium on the other hand gained a marked impetus, as also did Fiesole, Cortona, Perugia and Arezzo, the last of which was to

become by the fourth century B.C. the most populous city of central Italy after Rome.

About the end of the fifth century the Tyrrhenian empire sustained another fearful blow, with the invasion of the Po Valley by the Gallic hordes, which overran Lombardy. Just as the Etruscans had once before saved Italy from becoming a Greek colony, so now they constituted the bulwark against the barbarian onslaught from the north, whose waves again and again broke on the resistance of the Etruscan cities, or were at least weakened by it. Etruria stood alone in this struggle, since the Romans refused to form a common front against the invaders—an attitude which was later to be paid for at bitter cost in their defeat at the Allia and the destruction of Rome by the Gauls. It is well known how the Gauls refused to let themselves be induced to withdraw from Latium except at the price of an immense indemnity. After the loss of the Po Valley, it fell to northern Tuscany to withstand the spearhead of the Celts and to present a shield time and again against the thrusts of the barbarians. Meanwhile Rome was able to develop her power unmolested in the heart of Italy, and so eventually to fall on the flank of the Etruscans after they had been weakened by the struggle in the north.

By the beginning of the fourth century B.C. the Etruscan empire, which once had embraced half Italy, was reduced to little more than the original heart-land from which the colonising advance of the Tyrrhenians across upper and lower Italy had been initiated. The outlying bastions in the south and the north had fallen. Felsina, the capital of the northern empire, was still withstanding the pressure of the Gauls, but not for much longer; and the maritime supremacy of the Etruscans had been finally broken by the Greeks. The Tyrrhenians' last hope of recovering their influence in southern waters was shattered in 413 B.C., when the Athenians undertook their famous punitive expedition against Syracuse. In the great battle fought in the city's harbour, Etruscan ships took part alongside the Athenian fleet and shared in their destruction. This was the last large-scale action in which Tyrrhenian naval power played any part.

From then on the remnants of their power were worn down in a continual guerrilla warfare. In 368 B.C. ships of the Sicilian Greeks again appeared off the Etruscan coast and ravaged Pyrgi, the port of Caere; seized the remaining Tyrrhenian settlements on Elba; and founded a further strong-point on Corsica. The thrusts of the Syracusans up the Adriatic were also directed against the Etruscans who now lost to the Greeks their last outlet onto this sea, the port of Adria. But the great, fatal and decisive events for the Etruscan people were not those that befell them at sea or in their struggle with the savage Gallic hordes. Their destiny was settled in the century of bloody war with Rome, which began in the fourth century B.C.

Hitherto the Tyrrhenians had been tragically blind in failing to recognise the peril which Rome constituted for them. Rome was a city founded by the Etruscan kings, and the Latins were still only a half-civilised tribe in comparison with the Etruscans, who may well therefore have regarded them with the haughty contempt of an older race and an older culture, so that they could not believe in a serious menace from such a quarter. Besides this, the particularism of the individual states prevented them from united action on a large scale when it was most urgently needed.

Relations between the Latin league and the Etruscan confederation had grown less close since the secession of Latium. There was even a certain tension between Rome and Veii, arising from the conflict of interests of both towns in shipping on the Tiber and the salt-works at Fregenae. Rome was afraid of the power of Veii, whose sovereignty reached almost to her gates; and she also feared Veii as a competitor.

The first beginnings of the differences of Veii and the city on the Tiber might be compared to the distant lightning which portends the slow but inexorable approach of a storm. After various skirmishes in the last decades of the fifth century B.C. (in the course of which the Romans had already captured Fidenae, Veii's bridgehead across the Tiber, and killed the king of Veii, Larth Tolumnes), the

first great conflict between Rome and an Etruscan city-state broke out after a breathing space of twenty years.

Etruria's strongest bulwark to the south, after the secession of Latium, was provided by Veii; yet none of its partners supported it in the struggle. The friendly Falisci, whose minute territory had preserved its independence in the heart of Etruria, though thoroughly Etruscanised, were the only people who stood at Veii's side. The fact that Veii had begun hostilities with Rome on its own initiative was disastrous to it. The Etruscan league met in extraordinary session at the temple of Voltumna to discuss the question of armed help for the city in its dire peril, and took advantage of its formal infraction of the principles of the confederation as a pretext for standing aloof from the struggle. It is understandable that in comparison with the Gallic menace from the north, which called for the overwhelming proportion of the nation's resources, this quarrel between the two cities may have seemed to be of secondary importance.

Legend records a war of ten years' duration between Veii and Rome. The Roman record speaks of a "ceremony of the gods" (*lectisternium*) held in 399 B.C. in honour of three divine couples, on the occasion of a series of severe epidemics which had broken out in Rome as a result of the war; and this shows how grave a struggle it was for the city on the Tiber. The final decision was forced by Roman troops under the command of Furius Camillus, after years of siege against the town of Veii, which was militarily almost impregnable. Success was achieved not by direct assault but by a stratagem: the Romans eventually found a way of penetrating inside the fortress by means of an underground tunnel. They thus took the inhabitants by surprise, and butchered them.

For the Romans, their victory over Veii was the first great achievement of their nascent power. At one blow the Tiber had been transformed from a frontier into a Roman river. Beyond the Tiber, the rich lands of the conquered city made a considerable extension of Rome's sphere of influence, being partly annexed into direct possession and partly subjected at least to her control. The city-

state of Sutri, which belonged to Veii and was the most important key-point for a further advance into Etruria, also fell into Roman hands. Rome's victory over Veii finally released her from the shadow of Tyrrhenian dominion and at the same time laid an operational basis for all her future campaigns against the Etruscan city-states.

Of the north Etruscan towns, Melpum was the first to fall—according to tradition, on the same day as Veii. There followed the invasion of the Gauls, who avoided the strongly fortified towns like Fiesole, Arezzo and Clusium, and pushed down the Chiana valley towards Latium, where they found the Romans in process of consolidating their new frontiers with the Etruscans. If the Tyrrhenians had seized their opportunity as they might have at this juncture, they could easily have brought about the downfall of the city on the Tiber; but they let slip the unique chance of falling on the rear of the Romans while they were under desperate pressure from the Gauls. Perhaps at the sight of the savage Celtic hordes of half-naked warriors, whose impact had already been felt by the north Etruscan towns, they felt some revival of a feeling of solidarity binding them to Latium, which their ancestors had once civilised. This interpretation is suggested by the conduct of Caere, which strengthened its ties of friendship with the Romans when itself severely threatened by the Gallic invasions, and gave protection within its walls to the priests and Vestals of Rome. Moreover, the Etruscan confederation as a whole remained oblivious of the magnitude of its conflict with Rome. Only thus can we explain the fact that in the first (and as it turned out in retrospect, the decisive) phase of the war, there was never a general gathering of all available forces against the Latin enemy, but only isolated hostilities between Rome and the separate city-states in every case.

Thus, next after Veii, Tarquinia found herself facing the enmity of Rome without confederates. The struggle first flared up over Sutri, the key to the heart of Etruria, whose strategic importance for Rome's plans of expansion was rightly recognised by Tarquinia. The Roman forces were again led by the conqueror of Veii, Furius

Camillus. The Tyrrhenians' counter-attack was broken, and Tar-chuna lost two small strong-points on the frontier. The Etruscans next adopted the tactics of a break-through between the Vico and Bracciano lakes; and the army commanders of Tarquinia decided to seek out the enemy, by a bold stroke, on his own ground. With this in view they undertook a turning movement *via* the territory of Caere, to seize possession of the almost unguarded mouth of the Tiber and the salt-works of Fregenae, intending then no doubt to attempt a surprise attack on Rome itself.

One can only speculate how the history of Italy would have developed if the Romans had not had accurate information of the plan at this point. Thanks to it, they were able to throw an army against the Tyrrhenian forces at the last moment, and to defeat them. In spite of this fresh defeat, Tarquinia would still not admit itself beaten, and continued the war for several more years. A temporary end was eventually put to the hostilities by the forty-year truce, which has already been mentioned. Rome now felt strong enough to march against Caere in her turn. Caere had respected her pact with Rome to the extent of taking no direct part in the struggle, but had put mercenaries at Tarquinia's disposal and allowed their troops transit through her territory. On the grounds of this equivocal attitude, Rome now coerced Caere by threats into a peace-treaty of a hundred years' duration. This arrangement probably included provisions for disarmament which in practice put an end to Caere's independence as a sovereign city. The result, coupled with the conquest of Veii, was that the two members of the Etruscan confederation which immediately adjoined Rome's territory were finally neutralised. The barrier which previously protected Etruria against Latium was thus dismantled, and the route into the heart of Tyrrhenian territory lay open.

All the powers of resistance still left to the Etruscan nation in its decline now rallied round the capitals of the ancient heart-land from which the Tyrrhenian colonists had once launched their victorious advance north and south. While the separate city-states in this area

stroved to preserve their liberty in a series of bloody and desperate struggles, the north Etruscan cities, which had meanwhile risen to wealth and prosperity, succeeded in achieving their emancipation from the Tyrrhenian sphere of influence as it disintegrated, in much less dramatic circumstances. One of the chief causes of this development may be found in the fact that in these towns, which were founded considerably later than the great coastal centres, the Italian element must have made up the majority of the population, with only a superficial layer of Tyrrhenian domination. Consequently they may have felt themselves racially more akin to the Romans than to the Etruscans. The Etruscan culture certainly had impressed itself on the surface of their towns, but in the last analysis it remained essentially foreign to them. The economic and political problems of the northern city-states were also fundamentally different from those of the maritime commercial capitals, and impelled them inevitably towards a degree of co-operation with Rome. For the expansionism of Rome was developing primarily in a direction which did not directly touch the spheres of influence of the north Etruscan centres, and consequently it gave rise to no immediate occasions of conflict.

Drastic changes took place in the international political relations of the Tyrrhenians during the fourth century B.C. The century-old alliance with Carthage was severed; Carthage turned her back on the declining power of the Etruscans in favour of the rising star of Rome; and a pact was concluded between the two. On the other hand, the Etruscans buried their bitter, long-standing feud with Syracuse, and actually sent ships and mercenaries to the aid of the latter when it was besieged in 307 B.C. by the Carthaginians. There were even diplomatic contacts during this period between the Tyrrhenians and Alexander the Great.

When the forty-year truce with Tarquinia had expired, about 311 B.C., hostilities flared up again between Rome and the Etruscan states with renewed violence. This time it was not Tarchuna but Volsinium that took the lead in the struggle. The united forces of

the Tyrrhenian confederation (without Perugia, Cortona and Arezzo, which had entered into diplomatic negotiations with Rome) made a fresh attempt to recover the key-point of Sutri. This attack constituted a serious threat to Rome. The Tyrrhenians had again missed the ideal opportunity, when Rome was involved in a severe struggle with the Italian mountain-tribes; but the situation on the Samnite front was still far from secure, and Rome consequently could not count on the required protection of her rear.

The numerous episodes of the war over Sutri have been so overlaid with legend, and the strands of fact have become so confused that it is no longer possible to reconstruct the course of history. It is certain, in any case, that Sutri was repeatedly captured and lost again. Finally it appears that the Roman consul Quintus Fabius Rullianus, with only one legion against a large enemy force, succeeded in distracting the Etruscan armies while he crossed the thickly wooded and supposedly impassable mountains of Cimini. In the course of this operation another defeat was inflicted on the Tyrrhenian army, which was compelled to abandon the siege of Sutri in 309 B.C. After the failure of this expedition of the confederation, the power of Tarquinia was finally broken, and her role in Etruscan history was at an end.

The following years were marked by a general uncertainty and aimlessness in Etruria. The towns that still remained independent were unable to agree upon any concerted plan; the same was true of the whole Italian peninsula, torn as it was by internecine war. The rapid growth of mercenary armies had increased the numbers of armed adventurers, who harassed the Tiber valley and inland Etruria with robbery and pillage, as also did the Celtic bands. Commerce and agriculture were at their mercy.

The new rising of the Samnites against Rome in 299 B.C., however, led to a vigorous revival of the old national spirit in Etruria. For the first and last time, all the members of the Etruscan confederation that were still free united in joining a general alliance of all the enemies of Rome—the Samnites, the Umbrians, and this time even

the Gauls—to destroy their hated rival. But it was already too late. The Janus-head of fate had already turned the other way: the dark face of death now looked towards the Tyrrhenians, and the bright face of life towards the city of seven hills, which was already beginning to attract to itself all the forces of Italy. A single battle, at Sentino in the year 295 B.C., was enough to break the onslaught of Rome's enemies; and, into the bargain, the Roman legions broke through at several points into the remaining Tyrrhenian city-states, besieging Rusellae, fighting bloody battles in the neighbourhood of Volterra and Perugia, and inflicting fearful losses on the Etruscans. Vulci again appeared on the scene in the final phase of the Etruscan struggle with Rome, having partially overcome the severe crisis of her maritime trade in the fifth century and recovered some relics of her prime, thanks probably to a fortunate adaptation of her economy to intensive agriculture and inland trade.

The combination of Vulci and Volsinium constituted the last reserve of power that the dying Etruscan world could oppose to Rome. Everything that still survived of Etruria's strength as a nation now rallied round these two cities. The northern towns had already finally gone over to the enemy, so that on the occasion of this new rising of the Etruscan confederation under Volsinian leadership against Rome, Arezzo came into conflict with the former and was besieged by it. The Roman consul, Lucius Caecilius Metellus, was sent hastily to the support of the loyal city, and found himself confronted with a large Tyrrhenian army, reinforced with Gallic mercenaries, which inflicted an overwhelming defeat on him in open battle. The consul paid for his defeat with his life.

This victory again inflamed all the hopes of the Etruscans. They entered into an open alliance with the Celts, and moved from Volsinium in the direction of the Tiber valley in vast strength, to march on Rome. But even this last heroic attempt to defeat the inevitable was broken in a disastrous encounter with the legions of the Roman consul, Publius Cornelius Dolabella, in the neighbourhood of Lake Vadimon. The Tyrrhenians' capacity to take the offensive was at an

end. Fighting still went on along the frontiers of Vulci and Volsinium, but no further major set battle was undertaken by the Etruscans, and their will to resist gradually flagged.

The disruption of the confederation was reflected in the separate peace concluded between Rome and Volsinium in 280 B.C., by which Volsinium abandoned her ally, Vulci, as the price of her own territorial integrity. On the basis of this agreement Rome agreed to leave Vulci autonomous as a city, but took the whole of her territory under Roman control. The subsequent establishment of Roman prefects in Statonia and the harbour-town of Cosa deprived Vulci of all freedom of movement.

The bloody climax of the century-long struggle between Etruria and Rome was played out fifteen years later in Volsinium. Here in the spiritual capital of the Tyrrhenians was the sanctuary of the confederation, and with it all the proud and venerable traditions of the great age of Etruria. It stood amid the general wreckage as the last pillar of the disintegrating empire still intact. Here too, as disintegration set in, was ended the mortal struggle of the Etruscan world in a melancholy splendour and an atmosphere of apocalyptic horror. A revolt against Rome flared up among the traditionally conservative elements in the town; there was a last outbreak of bitter hatred against the Latin conquerors, which struck no echo this time among the other Tyrrhenian peoples; and political and social strife raged in Volsinium, the symptoms of the internal disintegration of the Etruscans' sense of political unity. A revolution overthrew the oligarchic constitution, tossing the offices of state to the popular parties to kick about like a football. Finally a communistic reign of terror was established—a thing unique in Etruscan history. Volsinium thus itself handed to the Romans the instrument of its own destruction, by supplying the pretext they desired to send their legions against the town with the ostensible purpose of helping to reinstate the expelled aristocracy.

Too late Volsinium recognised the trap which it had set itself. United again in the hour of death, the city put up a heroic and des-

perate resistance; but it was in vain. It finally succumbed in 264 B.C. to the superiority of the Romans, who plundered and pillaged without mercy. It was no doubt on this occasion that the nearby shrine of Voltumna was reduced to ruins and despoiled of its treasures that had been contributed by so many generations of the pious. The destructive determination of the conquerors went to such extremes that they sought to eliminate the very name of Volsinium, once the embodiment of the power and greatness of the Tyrrhenian empire, for ever from the face of the earth. They even compelled the surviving inhabitants of the town to resettle on another site, near the shores of Lake Bolsena.

With the fall of Volsinium, the history of the Etruscans as an independent nation came to an end. The Tyrrhenian heart-land was now virtually under Roman control, even if the individual cities still retained a nominal autonomy. The north Etruscan cities, on the other hand, submitted peacefully to the hegemony of Rome. Rome now launched a deliberate plan of driving the great arteries of the *Via Cassia*, *Via Aurelia* and *Via Claudia* through the subjugated territories, in order to establish her own strong-points in Etruria: thus Graviscae, Cosa, Luni, Statonia and Florence were linked to the capital. Finally, Etruscan sea-power had lost all importance: the Tyrrhenians could not even hold Corsica, which passed into the possession of Carthage.

The Tyrrhenian people had now spent their life-blood in a war on several fronts lasting with brief intervals for a century and a half. Their powers of resistance seemed to be finally broken; their passionate opposition to an irresistible destiny yielded gradually to silent resignation. Roman historical writing—so far as one can apply that term in the strict sense to the early records of the city of seven hills, with their embellishment of legend and their frequent contradictions—has shown little generosity to the Etruscan enemy. His successes were so far as possible concealed, his martial prowess belittled on every occasion, and his final downfall represented as the consequence of a general moral decay of the whole nation. Yet Roman propa-

ganda did not succeed in so falsifying the voice of the facts as to suppress all traces of the Tyrrhenians' heroic spirit in the final conflict, never abandoning their post, continually finding new reserves of heroism to defend their freedom.

Again and again the Roman records of the overthrow of the Etruscan city-states unwittingly betray the greatness of the enemy. Even the mighty jubilation with which victories over the Etruscans were celebrated, and the merciless annihilation of their towns, only show how highly the Romans judged their antagonist, and how greatly they feared him. His collapse followed inevitably upon the completion of the Tyrrhenian mission, which was to transmit to Rome, and through Rome to the West, the heritage of the ancient cultures of the East, in readiness for the creation of the new European world. Under strongly Hellenic spiritual influences, the Etruscans had already for centuries been preparing the ground for the Greeks; and now it was the Greeks who inherited the role of Rome's cultural mentors, as the Tyrrhenians quitted the stage of history.

The conquered Etrurian people withdrew into itself in dignified silence, no longer looking to the future but listening to the magical voice of a happy past that had gone for ever, trying to preserve the last glimmer of its splendour by a rigid adherence to ancient rites and formulae. The Romans spared its cultural and religious individuality, with that wise forbearance which was later so profitable in building up their world-empire; and this long survived. In the artistic sphere there still occur creations of a wonderful inward radiance. Nevertheless, the political and spiritual forces of the Tyrrhenian nation as such are spent; the concept of the Etruscan state is dead.

When the Gauls again entered Etruria in the hope of kindling another revolt against Rome, the Tyrrhenians renounced all right to a separate policy and united with the Romans in hurling themselves against the barbarians. They even took part in the victory of Talamon, where the Celtic threat to Italy was finally crushed. It was of course as a consequence of this annihilating defeat of the Gauls that

Rome occupied the valley of the Po, where the few Etruscan towns (such as Mantua) which had been spared the Celtic domination readily submitted themselves with the rest.

Only once again—when Hannibal was marching through Italy at the head of his Carthaginians in 208 B.C.—did a latent patriotism and an ancient sympathy rise again out of the glorious Etruscan past, at the sight of the people who had once been their allies. On that occasion the Romans even deemed it necessary to reinforce their garrisons in the Tyrrhenian cities, to forestall any possible impulse to revolt. The deep impression left on the Etruscans by the African hero was reflected in the gold coins minted by them at that date, depicting elephants in memory of Hannibal. The external impact of the Carthaginian invasion was not enough, however, to unleash a serious movement of rebellion. Pro-Roman influences gained the upper hand everywhere, and the Etruscan towns actually contributed liberally to the war with Carthage in provisions and materials.

The spiritual and philosophical subjugation of the Tyrrhenians by no means followed step by step on the heels of their military conquest. Too much of the ancient pride of a ruling race, and of the consciousness of their former superiority to the Romans, still survived in them to make that possible. So Etruria long remained the centre of severe political crises and upheavals—the outward accompaniments of a slow and painful process of inner transformation.

When the proposed social reforms of the Gracchi and their adherents led to the outbreak of a conflict between Rome and the Italian federation, this bloody civil war again seriously endangered Rome's ascendancy and strongly attracted Etruscan sympathies. The Etruscan cities, whose existence as juridically independent entities had gradually become an anachronism, now demanded Roman citizenship as well. There were frequent disturbances between the aristocratic party and the democrats. Clusium, Arezzo and the new Volsinium turned against Rome, and Roman troops had to be sent to suppress the rebels. The citizenship law introduced by L. Julius Caesar at the end of his consulate (89 B.C.), according Roman

citizenship to the loyal members of the federation, led eventually to the overthrow of the established conservative oligarchies that had tried to preserve a semblance of their old political autonomy and certain of their privileges. The democrats now gained the upper hand in practically the whole of Etruria, and allied themselves with the enemies of the dictator Sulla. When the latter returned from the east, however, and again seized power in Rome, the cities which had adopted a hostile attitude towards him had to pay a fearful price.

It was not for nothing that Sulla was called "the butcher of Etruria." He was responsible for the last terrible bloodbath that the Tyrrhenian people was to endure at the hands of Rome. He stormed, burned and plundered Arezzo, Fiesole, Volterra and Populonia. The last two endured three years of siege before he could capture them, which shows that even then the Tyrrhenians knew how to fight with obstinacy and defiance. The fury of the dictator was never forgotten by the Etruscans. When Sulla died, in a savage outburst of hatred they murdered all the veterans whom he had settled, as was his custom, on the towns he had conquered.

Even up to the time of Augustus there were still perceptible traces of the after-throes of these spiritual convulsions and rebellions which marked the process of Etruria's transformation from an independent system into a constituent part of the Roman Empire. Catiline, for instance, found the major part of his following in Arezzo and Fiesole. Perugia was the scene of a brief and bloody conflict after Caesar's death, between Lucius Antonius, who had entrenched himself there, and Octavian, whose legions eventually captured the town and committed a massacre among the inhabitants.

Finally under Augustus peace spread over the tormented land of Etruria. The process of denationalising the Etruscans had begun first in the sphere of administration, and then extended its grip to their spiritual life: now it made extraordinarily rapid progress in every sphere. As the gigantic empire of Rome unfolded its power, the memory of the people which had been its predecessor and paved the way for it quickly faded to a shadowy outline.

The Romans did everything possible to plunge into oblivion all record of the deeds of the Etruscan people, which had ruled over the Latins in the remote past. No heroic songs told of the tragic downfall of this proud nation; no chronicle extolled the deeds of its great men. Silently the Tyrrhenians move out of the dazzling limelight of history back into the darkness from which they once mysteriously rose into view, to awaken the Italian world from its prehistoric sleep. Their time had expired; their destiny was fulfilled.

Chapter Seven

A TYRRHENIAN HARBOUR-TOWN

VULCI was the central point of a wealthy countryside that radiated life around it. The town has vanished almost without a trace into the womb of the past; but the walls of Cosa, its harbour-town, are still standing today. The perimeter of their cyclopean masonry encircles the low eminence of a little spur near Orbetello. Obliquely opposite rises the silver-grey *massif* of Monte Argentario, separated from the sandy coast by a lagoon and rising like an island sheer out of the sea.

In the pallid atmosphere of springtime, dominated by the empty shell of a dead city, this landscape by the sea is steeped in a profound melancholy. The mark of desolation still lies like a shadow over the earth, even though it is slowly being reclaimed from the swamp which took possession of it after the downfall of the Tyrrhenians. All too long the peril of malaria has bred along this coast. Even the pink clouds of almond-blossom and the neat lines of the cultivated plots have not yet succeeded in obliterating the recollection of its thousand years of sway. They are tough, the clods of this soil from whose poisoned womb once proliferated the wild and deadly beauty of the coastal swamps; they yield but reluctantly to the spade; and at evening the swarms still drift across the ghostly stillness of the land to do their malignant work.

It is more than 600 years since man finally abandoned the hill of Cosa. Today dark green holm-oaks and prickly *macchia* grow over its stony slopes. Traces of the mediaeval life of Cosa (whose name was later changed to Ansedonia) are today reduced to a few shape-

less ruins, just like those of the more distant Roman period. Many centuries of change amount to no more than transitory masks on the primeval countenance of this sea-fortress of Etruria which now stares up at the heavens, freed once more, in all the solemnity of naked stone. Though the massive walls of Cosa today have nothing more to shelter than a glorious memory, they still convey from a distance the illusion of a city—a Tyrrhenian city surviving from a mysterious past. Gigantic blocks of stone stick out of the thickets of *macchia* here and there to a height of forty feet, looking like bleached bones of some huge monster of primeval legend; they surround the crest of the hill, nearly a mile in circumference. Although there is no mortar between the blocks to bind the razor-sharp edges, the passage of time has indissolubly welded them together. The lower part of the wall consists of polygonal stones, irregularly arranged, the upper of parallel layers. The fortress had fourteen square and two circular towers, the broad bases of which are still to be seen, and also four gates. Behind these walls Cosa once dominated the Tyrrhenian Sea—a virtually impregnable citadel.

Some relic of the massive splendour of Mycenaean citadels, with their colossal megalithic masonry, can be seen in the walls of this town, whose architecture is characteristic of the prehistoric Mediterranean cultures. Similar fortresses of "cyclopean" masonry were erected in Etruria itself and in areas colonised by the Tyrrhenians since approximately the middle of the sixth century B.C., when presumably the plundering inhabitants of the Abruzzi hills and the savage tribes of the Ligurian Alps were beginning to present a danger to the wealthy Etruscan cities. It is probable that previously the Tyrrhenian settlements were surrounded only by earthworks, since their superior armament and tactics no doubt left them nothing serious to fear from any local enemy. However, the Etruscans certainly knew the technique of cyclopean masonry.

The extraordinary precision with which the oldest walls are fitted together out of completely irregular blocks of stone, many of them as much as twelve feet long, six feet high and more than six feet wide,

indicates a degree of skill which must have rested on long practice and experience. The remains of such walls are still to be seen not only in Etruria itself but also at Palestrina, on the summit of Cape Circello and in the ancient frontier-forts of Cori and Nora, suspended high up on the slopes of the Monti Lepini overlooking the Roman Campagna. Their construction seems almost impossible to explain, given the meagre technical resources of their time. At a later date the Etruscans used smaller blocks for their walls, cut four-square and laid in parallel rows one on top of another. The same style appears even in the oldest wall of Rome, the so-called Servian Wall, of which a few remains can still be seen in the neighbourhood of the railway terminus. According to legend, this wall was built under Servius Tullius, but in reality it dates at the earliest from about the middle of the fourth century B.C. and was put up after the sack of Rome by the Gauls. However, the story of the Etruscan origin of this, the earliest of Rome's city-walls, is clear evidence that the Romans learned to build their walls from the Tyrrhenians.

The megalithic wall of Cosa is still in places wide enough to have allowed two ancient warriors in full equipment to pass each other without difficulty, as the Etruscan regulations for wall-building laid down. From its squat observation-towers sentries must once have watched the limitless surface of the sea for the square, coloured sails of the Etruscan fleet. An earthenware lid has survived which shows the appearance of their ships, like huge mythical beasts, with the deadly grappling-hooks projecting menacingly from their jaws like hideous tusks. In contrast to the slender vessels of the Greeks, Etruscan ships were broader and higher; consequently they may have been heavier to manœuvre, but they had the advantage in stability. There may very well have been a shipyard in Cosa.

Today it would be almost impossible for a large fishing-boat to put into the port of the dead town, so completely is it silted up. But at one time it must have made a splendid sight with its brilliantly painted ships' hulls, its crowds of travellers coming and going, its merchants and customers from the most diverse countries and

quarters of the earth. In the time of Etruria's glory throngs of merchants, with their costly cargoes of foreign luxuries, must have passed under the stone archways of Cosa: today empty gaps in the circuit of the walls gape open in their place, and only the upright supports of the portcullis are preserved, with the deep indentations into which it fell. In early times the Etruscans no doubt paid for their imports principally with raw materials—above all, iron, copper, lead and silver. Later these were supplemented with a rich selection of exquisitely tooled articles of everyday use. Such exports went all over the Mediterranean countries and to almost the whole of Europe.



6. *Merchant ship (from a bronze)*

There have been numerous finds of metal objects for domestic use (chiefly cooking and eating utensils), as well as ornaments and weapons of Etruscan workmanship, not only in the region of the Alps and the Rhine but even in Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, England, Ireland and Hungary; and these illustrate the astonishing range of the Tyrrhenians' commercial contacts.

From the earliest times the Etruscans also imported Baltic amber, which was so highly valued by the ancient world, in its raw state. It was principally worked into ornaments at Vetulonia, and then some was put in store at home and some was re-exported. From the Alps, again, the Etruscans imported gold as the basic material of

their wonderful works of craftsmanship. In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. engraved Etruscan mirrors, candle-sticks, weapons and vessels of bronze or precious metals were articles in great demand even in Greece. The ladies of Athens particularly prized the smart two-piece sandals which came from Etruria, with copper nails fastening the soles and gold and silver straps. The fine Etruscan woollens also enjoyed a high reputation in Greece. The cargoes of ships leaving the port of Cosa were therefore hardly less valuable, at least in the great period of the Tyrrhenians, than those which returned to the shores of Etruria from abroad, whether imports from Egypt, Phoenicia, Greece and Asia Minor, or even the proceeds of successful piracy. Piracy was just as popular with the Greeks as with the Tyrrhenians at that date; and Pliny ascribes to the latter the practice of fixing beaks to the prows of their pirate-ships, which were dreaded on every sea.

Of the vigorous and colourful life of Cosa, nothing now remains but grey stones—innumerable stones with the tall pale asphodel, the flower of death, growing between them in the springtime. From the summit of what used to be the Acropolis, the eye roams down over the rock-strewn slopes, down to where the last sixty feet of precipice plunge sheer into the sea. Two ruined towers rise above the cliffs—once watch-towers designed to protect mediaeval Ansedonia, which fell about the year 1000 A.D. into the hands of the Saracens, who were able to maintain themselves for many years on this wall-girt height. Perhaps, too, there once stood on one of the spurs above the surging sea the look-out mentioned in ancient records, to watch over the lines used to haul in the tunny-fish—a widespread practice among the Tyrrhenians.

Today the desolation of the centuries lies like a thick veil of silence over the hill of Cosa and its ruins, broken occasionally by the shrill scream of the seagull. Yet even here death's triumph over the Etruscan people is not absolute. Beyond the foothills the coastline still bears intact on its level surface a splendid memorial of the Tyrrhenians' settlement, which once conjured a fertile garden out of

the swampy soil. To this day, just as two and a half millennia ago, the landscape is still transected by the clear-cut line of an ancient Etruscan canal, carrying the water of Lake Burano to the sea.

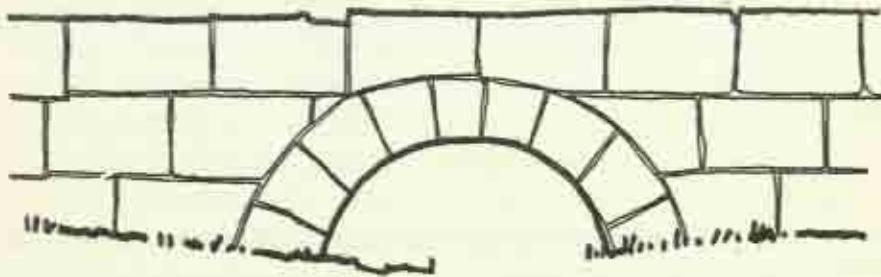
No monument could better convey the importance of the Tyrrhenian people to Italy than this skilfully designed watercourse, still serving as a source of life and fertility. It is more than three miles long, and debouches immediately below the cliff of Cosa into the perpetually troubled sea. One can still see how the designers of the canal originally tried to make it reach the sea by the shortest route. But as it became evident that its outlet at sea-level was liable continually to silt up, the Etruscan engineers changed their plan and carried the canal parallel to the coast up to the base of the foothills. Here in the steep cliff-face a huge cleft opened, known today as the *Spacco della Regina*. This the Etruscans widened, and diverted their canal through an angle of 180 degrees, to continue its course underground. As an extension of the natural cleft they drove a tunnel through the cliff, to open onto the sea about a hundred yards further on.

To avert the danger of silting up and blockage, the Tyrrhenian engineers further placed a stone barrier at an angle to the opening of the tunnel and a short distance from it, to break the force of the sea-waves while the canal-water poured unhindered into the sea behind the shelter of it. To complete their simple and ingenious design, the Etruscans also devised a sort of safety-valve in the form of a small side-tunnel branching off just in front of the main outlet. This also flowed into the sea in the neighbourhood of the breakwater, creating an undercurrent which drew off to one side any sand or seaweed that found its way into the main channel.

Today the partially walled-in ceiling of the main tunnel has fallen in at many points. All that remains of the breakwater is a rock projecting from the waves, eroded by the salt water. Yet even in this half-ruined condition the Etruscans' handiwork is still preserved unaltered. Its design reminds one inevitably of the great waterworks of Mycenaean prehistory—for instance, the drainage system of Lake

Copais in Boeotia, which has been restored in modern times. This also consisted of two vast extensions driven through the hillside to continue natural fissures in the ground. The lakes in the Alban hills at Rome seem also to have been regulated by works of a similar kind in Etruscan times. There are besides numerous traces of canals and irrigation works in areas once colonised by the Etruscans. Not for nothing did legend ascribe the construction of the *cloaca maxima* at Rome to the Tarquins.

An example of a covered-in watercourse in the Tyrrhenian style survives in the neighbourhood of Tarquinia, at Porto San Clementino, formerly the Roman-Etruscan harbour of Graviscae. In this case the watercourse is roofed over with a barrel-vault about thirty feet high, made of large stone blocks fitted together without mortar.



7. The watercourse at Graviscae (Porto San Clementino)

Water-supply and drainage were exceptionally well organised throughout all the Etruscan cities. Along the streets ran ditches, sometimes cut straight out of the rock, which were covered over with slabs. The functions of these was to collect drain-water from the houses and streets, and to carry it away to a large sewer, or sometimes direct to a river-bed. The layout of such a system can still be seen today at Bieda and in the area of excavations at Marzabotto, near Bologna. As the finds at Marzabotto show, some of the houses even had tiled water-supplies built into the walls. The fountains into which the Etruscans canalised their vital water-supply thousands of

years ago are in many places still preserved. At the foot of a hill near Misano, where the ancient settlement of Marzabotto once stood, fresh water still bubbles out of an Etruscan spout, to which it is conducted by several skilfully constructed channels. At Cerveteri, too, an old Tyrrhenian water-supply has been brought into use again in recent years.

At Rome the marshy hollow of the Forum was originally drained by an irrigation system based on an Etruscan model; and so was laid the seed-bed of a world-empire to be. It was the hands of the Etruscans, again, that bestowed on the soil of Italy its first experience of cultivation on a large scale: so this was yet another sphere in which the Romans were the pupils of the Tyrrhenians, to whom they owed the civilising experience of thousands of years of east Mediterranean culture.

Water-control was a kind of creative exercise upon the forces of nature which held a deep attraction for the Tyrrhenians: it gripped them with an almost ritual significance. Nothing certain is known about their cult of water, but it certainly came to play an important role in their religious ceremonies. In searching for buried shrines today, for instance, in the neighbourhood of Etruscan cities of the dead, archaeology can safely let itself be guided by the location of springs, since these were practically always enclosed within the plan of the temple. It is even possible that the Italians' aptitude and passion for constructing beautiful fountains and waterworks of all kinds are to this day, in the last analysis, an inheritance from the Etruscan period.

The watercourse at Cosa was itself connected with a shrine buried deep in the heart of the mountain. A little way from its outlet, a passage runs into the side of the cliff and opens out into a considerable cleft, the walls of which still show clear signs of human working. A feeble, pale green light from the opening of the crevasse, far up above, pierces down into the damp abyss, which was once transformed by artificial enlargement into a long narrow cave. Another passage leads out of it into a similar chamber, which is

again connected through another low tunnel with a third, oval-shaped cave. The rear part of this chamber was blocked by a fall of rock, so that it is no longer possible to establish whether the curious arrangement goes any further. The passage goes more than a hundred yards into the mountain, alternating three times from darkness to an eerie twilight and back again. Even the dull roar of the sea does not penetrate in here; only the quiet rattle of crumbling stone occasionally breaks the deathly silence.

There is a distinct possibility that there may have been a shrine of the Cabeiroi here, though their cult is not positively authenticated among the Tyrrhenians. The Cabeiroi were a pair of male divinities—the father, Cabeiros, and his son, Cadmilos—who were regarded as the protectors of seafarers. Their mystery-cult was chiefly practised on Samothrace, Lemnos and Imbros, and no doubt derives from a primitive period of veneration for the demonic forces of nature, the earth and the sea. The fact that the ritual formulae of Cabeiroi-worship were still preserved in a foreign idiom even in historical times suggests that it belonged to the primitive pre-Greek religion, which embraced the whole east Mediterranean world and survived into historical times in the mystery-cults. The Tyrrhenians' presence in Lemnos is a proved fact; and they could have brought the Cabeiroi with them from there and established their worship, important as it was for seafarers, in Italy as well.

Probably it was originally a cult practised in caves. Later on, according to tradition, the shrines of the Cabeiroi were always to be found in lonely places and in the vicinity of water. Very little is known about the mysteries of the Cabeiroi; but in contrast to those of Eleusis they seem not to have had an ethical content but to have consisted rather of prayers and appeals to the protecting deities. In hellenistic times the cult of the Cabeiroi again enjoyed a remarkable popularity. The snake and the hammer—unmistakably chthonian symbols—were the attributes of both deities, who later came to be identified with Hephaestus and Hermes.

Though there is much to be said for the view that the subterranean

chambers at Cosa belonged to the cult of the *Cabeiroi*, it will never be established for certain what long-forgotten deity was in fact worshipped here. It is certain only that in one form or another it embodies the cult of water—the everlasting, ever-changing primeval element whose divine power was a matter of superstitious awe to the Tythenians.

Chapter Eight

THE RIVAL OF ROME

NOT far from Rome is the bare hill on which the Etruscan town of Veii once stood, surrounded by the roar of water. So near is it that at night the faint glow of the great city actually illuminates its horizon. Veii was already a fortress surrounded by cyclopean walls at a time when those same hills in the Tiber valley, which were one day to be the site of Rome, were inhabited only by half-savage peasants and herdsmen living in mud huts. To the Latin tribes this wealthy city, with its decorated palaces and venerable shrines and its images of the gods with downcast eyes, may well have seemed like a castle in fairyland.

Destiny linked Veii and Rome from the first. By the seventh century B.C. the splendid civilisation of Veii, barely twelve miles from Rome, had already played a decisive part in the early development of the city on the seven hills, second only to that of Tarquinia. Veii's sovereignty stretched right down to the Tiber, the right bank of which (including the hills of the Vatican, the Janiculum, and the modern Monte Mario) was known as the "Etruscan bank". Seven Tyrrhenian villages crowned the heights, in dominating positions over the river valley.

For centuries Rome grew in the shadow of Veii. It may have been due to this that the highly-developed drainage-system of the Etruscan fortress came to serve as a model for the Roman water-system, just as its walls, houses and temples influenced the architectural character of the settlement on the Tiber. From the purely artistic point of view, too, Rome seems originally to have been dependent on Veii. One

of the few ancient records of the mutual relations of Rome and Veii in this field indicates that the terracotta decorations and statues of the temple of Jupiter, erected on the Capitol in 509 B.C., were made by artists from the school of pottery at Veii.

At this early period the Romans recognised with admiration the spiritual and artistic superiority of the Tyrrhenians, and did their utmost to adapt to their own use the skill and science that the more advanced nation had to offer them. Nevertheless, the future masters of the world were not slow to develop that individuality of outlook and character which was to form a major part of their strength. The Tyrrhenians had always been ready to draw upon alien streams of culture in order to develop their own potentialities; they had shown a marked liberal-mindedness in religious, cultural and political matters. The same characteristics appear later on in the Romans. Even at periods of the most intense hostility towards the Greek people, Etruscan imports of Greek vases and other works of art were undiminished and the Etruscans' respect for the Greek genius remained unclouded. A similar large-mindedness in the spiritual sphere later characterised Rome's domination over foreign peoples. The Etruscans' love of splendour, and of brilliant ostentation as an expression of power, was carried to an altogether extravagant excess in the Rome of the Caesars. Again, the practice of strict submission to the religious system, and of exact conformity with all its regulations, may well be an inheritance from the Tyrrhenians. It was exactly this spiritual attitude that no doubt provided the foundation-stone on which the structure of Rome's world-empire was later erected. Finally, it is impossible to estimate the importance of the complicated formulae of the "Etruscan Discipline" in developing the Romans' mental acumen and observational powers: it taught the Romans not only the most precise skill in observing all natural phenomena, but also the capacity to analyse and classify them and to draw conclusions from them.

The few fragments preserved, in Latin, from the ritual books of the Etruscans show an extraordinary precision of expression, combined

with the most careful selection of the appropriate words and an astonishing clarity of exposition—all qualities which were later to be admired in Roman law. The penetration of the Italian spirit with ideas from the Tyrrhenian stock is especially apparent in the adoption of Etruscan words by the Latin language. In particular religious concepts, and some connected with public affairs, point to the role of the Etruscans in the life of the Latins: for instance, *mundus*, *persona*, *cella*, *populus*, etc. To these technical terms must be added numerous others, such as *asinus*, *catena*, *fenestra*; possibly even *amor* is an Etruscan word. It is practically accepted today that the name of Rome is connected with the Tyrrhenian words *ruma* and *rumlna*. It is also certain that Italian place-names, proper names and family names include a great wealth of Etruscan forms.

When Rome shook off the hegemony of the Tyrrhenians a hundred years later, she was probably already near to dreaming of a future rivalry with Veii, whose splendour at that date might bear comparison with Athens. Veii could be excused for not taking this quite seriously at first; the Etruscans had so recently been present at the very baptism of Rome, who was now presuming to lift her head higher and higher in support of her claim to a route for her metals to the south and for her salt-trade to the north. But Rome's new-born national pride was finding it more and more intolerable to put up with the proximity of the Tyrrhenians, who extended their sway right up to the gates of the city and had no difficulty in restricting her traffic on the river. The first brush with the powerful city-state was enough to convince the Romans of the decisive importance of the struggle. The legend which has overlaid the Veian war shows clearly enough the fateful importance they ascribed to it. The defeat of the Romans in one of the first skirmishes was soon transfigured into heroic terms by Roman tradition. Allegedly three hundred young men of the Fabian clan had undertaken an assault on Veii, and were caught in an ambush by an overwhelming force which cut them down to a man, except one who survived to become the founder of that celebrated family.

Veii only began to take the hostility of Rome in deadly earnest when its king, Lars Tullumnes, fell at Fidenae and the place was taken by the Romans. The outcome of the great contest for Veii, which entered its final phase twenty years after the death of the king, has already been described. The superstitious fatalism of the Tyrrhenians found a curious satisfaction in the fact that Veii herself put into the hands of the enemy the weapon of her own destruction. The town could never have been defeated by purely military means, set as it was on an eminence secured on every side and successfully defended with the utmost determination for many years against every assault of the Romans. It was the water-supply and drainage-system, cut through the tufa foundations of the town in an underground network of channels and conduits, that finally gave the Romans the crucial inspiration of the way to capture the Tyrrhenian fortress. Veii was not destined to fall by open assault: the gods of the underworld themselves betrayed her. Death was to rise up against them from the very womb of the earth—the earth which the Etruscans had loved with such religious passion; the red, living rock to which they had for centuries committed their dead. It is not certain whether the Romans made direct use of an Etruscan conduit to force their way in, or whether they merely took one as a model for the tunnel they drove into the heart of the town; but, in either case, the Etruscans were led to their doom by the very water-system that they had themselves so skilfully constructed.

The Romans' jubilation knew no bounds at the conquest of their dreaded and much-respected rival. Furius Camillus rode in triumph on a chariot drawn by four white horses to the Capitol, followed by his men, to make his thank-offering: he wore the trappings of Capitoline Jupiter and his face was stained red with lead, in imitation of the greatest of the gods. And so Rome passed the first great test of her manhood.

The history of Veii was more or less at an end with her conquest at the hands of Rome. After the last fearful, desperate battle, in which the inhabitants were completely taken by surprise, there still

remained a small number of survivors alive; and at a later date Rome tried to restore the town, which had been abandoned and largely destroyed, to a new prosperity by establishing colonists there; but the life of Roman Veii was no more than the last faint agony of an organism in which the will to survive had already wholly perished. Deeper and deeper silence settled down on the empty streets, the shattered temples, the dilapidated houses. In the time of Augustus, the poet Propertius sang the tragic fate of the Etruscan city in these moving, melancholy words: "O ancient Veii, thou wast then a power, and a throne of gold stood in thy forum! Today within the circle of thy walls there echoes only the horn of the lazy shepherd; and from among thy bones are reaped the crops of the field!"

A vast and empty plain; an island worn smooth and bare by the storms of two thousand years, projecting from the rust-red foundation of rock: such is Veii today. So utterly forgotten by god and man was the once-great rival of Rome that even the place where Veii stood had been lost to memory, and the remains of some Etruscan buildings near Civitacastellana were assumed to be the last traces of the city. The rock of Veii was only identified again with certainty on the re-discovery of the Tyrrhenian world in the seventeenth century.

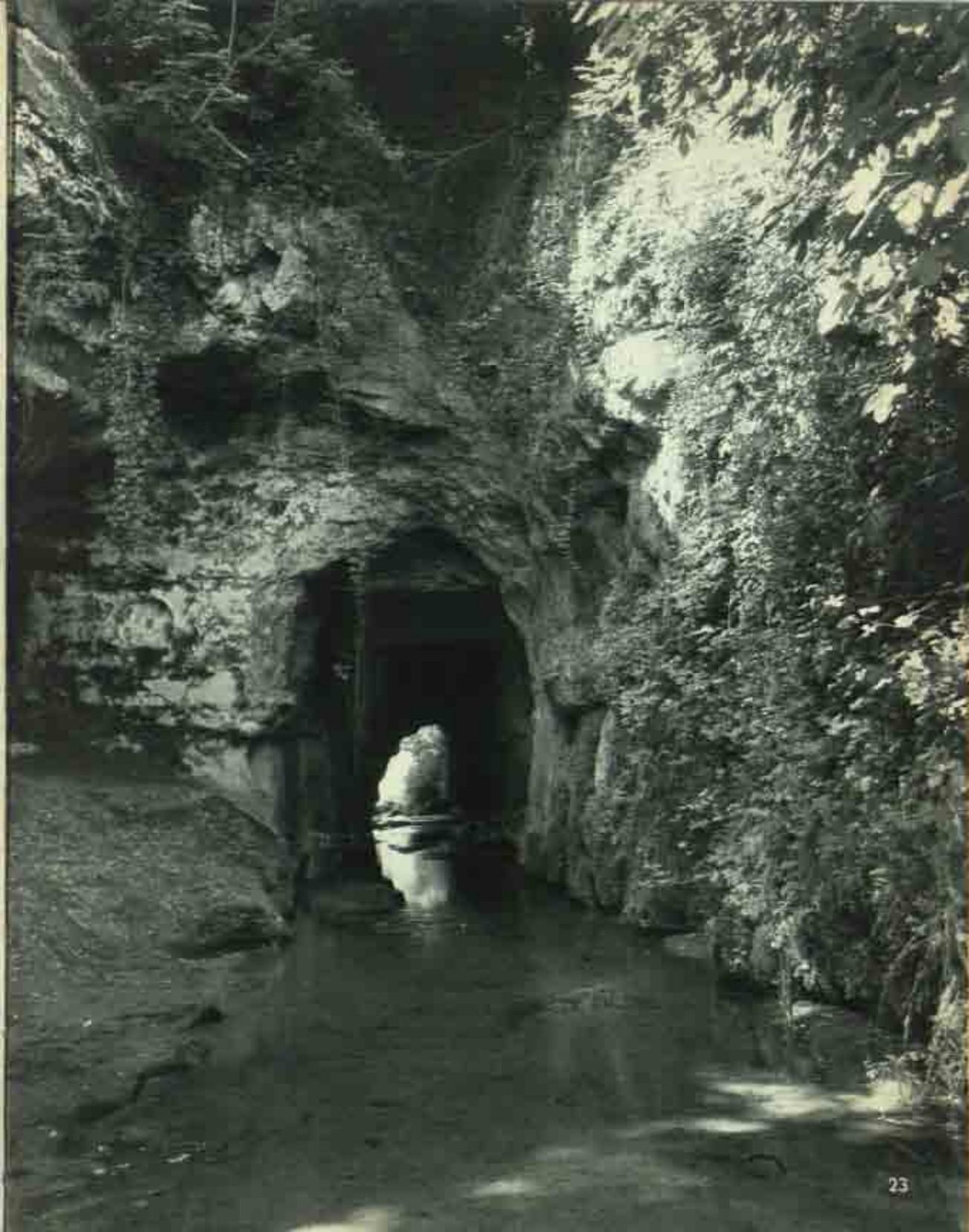
Yet something of the shattered life of the ancient city survived with an extraordinary vitality through scores of centuries. The waters of Veii still flow through the same conduits that the Tyrrhenians drove through the brown rock; the springs of the sacred compounds still trickle down; and the wild river Créméra still roars through the vast tunnel cut in the side of the mountain by Etruscan builders, just as it did thousands of years ago. The sound of the rushing water still surrounds the lonely height, like a melancholy dirge from the depths of the earth. Silvery clouds of spray leap out of the gullies like the smoke of huge sacrificial fires; and at evening the tufa-stone glows red as curdled blood.

A little below the plateau on which the city stood, on the very edge of the precipice, a terrace stands out of the hillside. Here stood a great shrine, outside the perimeter of the walls. Probably it was

dedicated to the gods of the water, who for so long protected the hill of Veii. This temple too seems to have fallen a victim to the flames when the city was destroyed. The fire must have devoured its wooden columns and the steep-gabled roof, and split the painted terracottas and the statues which decorated it. Only the stone foundations remain, showing the outline of the tripartite *cella* with the broad basin in front of it to catch the water from the sacred springs. The springs still flow today, but no one now believes in their sacred power: the magic is long vanished, and grassy earth now chokes the source from which true believers used once to drink with pious supplications. In the days when this shrine still stood out prominently on the spur of rock, its divinity must have been environed night and day by the solemn, monotonous music of the murmuring springs. From all round the temple-precinct tunnels still run deep into the heart of the hill, all of which once carried water from its outlets—healing, life-giving water for the sick; and purifying water to cleanse the blood of slain beasts from the huge triangular altar before the house of the god; and sacred water for ritual ablutions and ceremonies. A whole system of channels cut in the stone ramifies round the ruins of the temple, still clearly visible. Long after the Romans had forgotten how nearly the destiny of their new-born capital was once shattered on the walls of Veii, they drove across its ruins one of those roads made of great blocks of smoothed stone with which they used to defy the passage of centuries.

The peace of this sanctuary was first disturbed by archaeology only within the last few decades; and in 1916 it yielded a remarkable find. It was the first serious shock to the complacency of all those scholars who had been inclined to deny Etruscan art the least originality and to see in it only a debased imitation of the Greeks. On this spot an Etruscan god was at last released from his hiding-place of thousands of years: it was the Apollo of Veii. (Plates 24 and 25.)

The undamaged face of the god, with its enigmatic smile, is said to have been uncovered first by the excavator's spade. He was still standing upright after the fall of the temple, just as he had always









stood: the immortals of the doomed city had taken the precaution of descending into the bosom of the earth on their own initiative, in order not to be present at its destruction. The sight of the god's head solemnly protruding from the earth is said to have been so overwhelming that its discoverer threw himself on the ground in a transport of emotion, covering it with tears and kisses of joy.

It is certainly true that the emotional effect of this figure, which now stands in the Museum of the Villa Giulia at Rome, is more exciting than that of almost any other ancient work of art. There is a world of difference between this god of gilded clay, with his dark, almost swarthy face, and the severe, abstract dignity of archaic Greek figures of Apollo, with those divine but empty smiles on their features and those eyes seemingly sunk in ecstatic contemplation of eternal truths. The smile of the Etruscan Apollo, on the contrary, is a thing of awe. Behind his downcast look and the predatory line of his upturned lips, there lurks the pitiless cruelty of the universe. This is no radiant creature of the heavens: this is an expression of the incomprehensible powers of creation, throbbing in the fierce strength of his limbs as they advance. The power of mighty natural forces has stretched tight the muscles beneath the thin garments; and behind the broad, saturnine forehead there lurks the mystery of death. The Greek god of music lent to this god no more than his name; and the creator of this work of art succeeded in breaking through the mould he borrowed from the Greeks, ignoring its inner structure to achieve a sensuous expression of his own imperious will. There is no more of classic objectivity about this work than there is of classic peace. Only the will and the temperament of the artist count: his god was not designed to embody the perfection of things, but their perpetual change—the agony that torments mankind in birth and death; the fear, the desire, the pain of every living thing.

The work is notable for a striking directness, which is foreign to Greek art. It has been ascribed to Vulca of Veii, the one Etruscan artist whose name is known to tradition as the maker of the terracotta statues of the Capitoline temple to Jupiter. In all probability the

Apollo of Veii belonged to a group representing the theft of the sacred hind by Hercules from the temple of Apollo at Delphi. It may have been set up in the temple as a votive gift. Isolated fragments of the other figures have also been found.

At the same spot where the Apollo was found, a more recent discovery at a lower level was the life-size statue of a woman, carrying a child on her arm. Unfortunately the heads of both bodies are missing, but the dynamism of the advancing figure and the highly individual and decorative stylisation of her flowing garment display the same mastery that characterises the artist of the Apollo. (Plate 26.) Here again a realism unprecedented at this early date (which was the end of the sixth century B.C.) has burst through the limits imposed by archaic rules of form and resulted in a work of moving vitality. The mother's head is lost for ever; but there is an incomparable feeling for maternity about the gesture of the slender, lovely hand laid protectively on the child's knee. The same softness and strength are to be found thousands of years later in Andrea della Robbia's Madonnas, holding the Son of God in their arms; and in such masterpieces the age-old plastic tradition of Tuscan sculpture flourishes anew.

The discoveries at Veii have silenced all strictures on the lack of originality in Etruscan sculpture. It is indisputable that the artistic school of Veii produced sculpture in the round of high skill and the greatest originality. The material of these carvings naturally imposed a certain compact heaviness on the figures; but this was perhaps in itself more consistent with the Etruscans' feeling for art than the immaculate sheen and ethereal beauty of sculpture in marble. The Tyrrhenians originally had no access to the marble of Carrara, which lay in the territory controlled by the hostile Ligurians; but it is no accident that even later they did remarkably little work in marble. To the end they remained faithful to their preference of archaic times for terracotta sculpture and the unpretentious stones available in their own neighbourhood.

Unquestionably the Etruscans' greatest works of representational

art, however, were those executed in bronze. Ancient tradition continually reiterates the mastery of the Tyrrhenians in this field. And it is a fact that the few surviving large bronze figures (with the exception of the Mars of Todi, an uninspired conventional piece) are of a superlative perfection. Fate has been ungenerous in withholding from us any single example of a human figure in bronze from the archaic period, but there are on the other hand two figures of animals: the Capitoline she-wolf and the *Chimaera* found at Arezzo. These provide a remarkable illustration of the level of sculpture at the turn of the sixth-fifth centuries B.C.

There is no end to what has been said and written about the she-wolf, the beast of death and the underworld in the eyes of the Etruscans, which became for the Romans a symbol of their divinely willed origin and a kind of totemic animal of their race. This particular figure was long taken to be a mediaeval bronze, which is not so surprising if one bears in mind the astounding affinity to early Etruscan works shown by Romanesque and Gothic art, especially in central and northern Italy. Later the she-wolf was pronounced to be a Greek work, since there were still many scholars who refused to ascribe a work of such superlative quality to anything but the creative spirit of the Greeks. Yet the she-wolf unmistakably breathes that same vitality, emanating from the uttermost depths of its being, that same demonic strength and savagery, which we find in the Apollo of Veii. There is an uncanny menace in the alert, upstretched face of the animal, with its strangely stylised eyes set in triangular sockets; there is a fearful tension trembling in its lean and wiry limbs. The play of the muscles in the sinewy flanks is reproduced with a masterly knowledge of animal anatomy, which is also apparent in the treatment of the head with its outstretched muzzle and the delicate network of veins quivering in it. Yet the pulsating vitality of the animal is still confined within the framework of a stylised severity which lifts the figure right out of the level of earthly animality into the sphere of the transcendental, transforming it into a legendary being of sublime and awful majesty. (Plate 28.)

The *Chimaera*, which was found in the Renaissance and restored by Cellini, dates probably from a few decades later than the she-wolf, the origin of which is dated towards the end of the sixth century. In the *Chimaera* the artist's impulse has finally broken through the limitations of archaic tradition to attain the most dramatic heights of expression. This masterly and terrifying creation of prehistoric legend has freed itself from all sense of constraint and repression. The animal is caught at the moment of its rounding on the enemy, when it is already mortally wounded, with a last fearful roar of defiance. The head is transfixated in a mask of furious rage; and round it the mane bristles in rows of little flame-like tongues, ornamenteally stylised like that of the she-wolf. The hairs on the back (the only break in the smooth surface of the animal, except for the mane) are serrated like a comb. The beast's huge claws dig into the ground, as if ready to hurl its body against the enemy in a final spasm, while the heads of the snake that forms the *Chimaera's* tail and the vulture-beaked antelope that grows out of its back are already locked in the agony of death.

This epoch must certainly also have produced magnificent bronze figures of its gods. The little bronzes depicting severely graceful goddesses, or satyrs, warriors, priests, acrobats and worshippers, which we have in considerable numbers from the fifth century B.C., are perfect of their kind; but they naturally give only a slight idea, at best, of the broad outlines of the larger-scale sculpture and the technical mastery of the Etruscans in handling bronze. Their practice was first to cast it and then to work over it again. A larger example is the bronze hand found at Orvieto: an exceptionally slender hand of the most exquisite cast, with long fingers and a bracelet in the shape of a snake winding round the powerful wrist. The finger-tips are remarkably arched, and on the second joint of the little finger is a ring. The attitude of the hand makes it clear that it was holding something, in all probability a rein; and it has been suggested that it belonged to a figure of Diana driving a chariot. A wonderful figure indeed it must have been that incorporated this divinely beautiful

fragment, which seems like a melancholy symbol of all the loveliness that has vanished irrevocably into the darkness of the ages.

From the abandoned ruins of the water-sanctuary of Veii, in whose precincts the figure of Apollo was found, a path leads up to the desolate plateau on which the town itself once stood. The ruins of Veii were long almost swallowed up in the earth. Red and blue anemones grow in the spring out of the thin soil, and from it the peasant's plough continually turns up fragments of pottery or tiles. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, an accident led to the discovery of the remains of another archaic temple, which stood between two springs carried down artificial channels. The first excavations were unfortunately interrupted by the beginning of the war, but they had already brought to light a large quantity of votive figures in pottery. Almost all of them represent mothers with infants in arms, so that the sanctuary may be presumed to have belonged to a deity of maternal fertility. Here, too, as generally throughout the area of this town which came to such an untimely end, there are no doubt undreamt-of treasures still awaiting discovery.

Of the cyclopean fortifications of Veii, the wall that enclosed the Acropolis or inner citadel on the highest point of the plateau is still preserved. Here the cliff drops straight down some two hundred feet into the gorge, where two torrents unite at its base, cutting off the island of tufa on which Veii stands. On this Acropolis, in the shelter of the sanctuary of Juno Regina, their patron-goddess, the inhabitants were to find their last refuge when the enemy had broken through the outer fortifications. There is still a little water in the cistern from which the besieged inhabitants must have drunk; and beneath the wild shrubbery there is still to be seen a little opening in the dilapidated wall, which was their outlet to the world. Here was the most impregnable spot in the city; here was the spot which the enemy's tunnel had to reach in order to destroy Veii; and so it happened. Legend has it that the sanctuary of the patron-goddess was the very point where disaster broke in upon the city. The

Romans had pushed their underground tunnel to a point immediately beneath the temple, where the *baruspex* was engaged on the ceremony of divination from the entrails. On inspecting the sacrificial liver, he had declared that victory must fall to whoever held it in his hands. This pronouncement had been overheard by the Romans, who were at that moment separated from the temple only by a shallow layer of earth. Taking it as a divine call of inspiration, they broke through from below. Their leader seized the liver from the hands of the priest, while the flood of warriors poured down the streets of the unsuspecting town, drunk with victory. Torrents of flame and blood engulfed unhappy Veii, whose inhabitants fought the enemy in final desperation with stones and tiles hurled down from the very roofs of their burning houses. And at last this hill-top, which is today so silent and deserted, must have blazed like a smoking torch of death across the landscape, while the cries of the dying merged into the roar of the rivers and the waters were stained red by the blood of the fallen.

The walls of Veii, which failed to save the town from its downfall, now lie in ruins. But one astonishing achievement of Etruscan engineering, itself part of the fortification-system, is still practically intact. This is the cutting made through the mountain to divert the Créméra. About twenty-seven feet high and twenty-three feet wide, this tunnel still carries the waters of the little river just as it did 2600 years ago, pouring down its twilit shadows in chattering cascades. The old bed of the river can still be seen, sweeping round at a distance from the foot of the cliff in a curve which the Tyrrhenians found unsatisfactory, no doubt on technical grounds of defence. The natural bridge, which was preserved in constructing the tunnel, was reinforced with walls and battlements to serve as a bulwark; and at the same time the construction served the purpose of supplying water to the town in case of siege. A round opening was cut through the solid rock above the tunnel (and is still to be seen), through which vessels could be lowered to draw up water from the Créméra as if from a cistern. This construction of the Etruscans is popularly

known as the *Ponte Soda*, or "solid bridge" (i.e. a bridge cut out of the rock). (Plate 23.)

Not far from here, in the slope of one of the little hillocks that surround the summit of Veii, there is a narrow opening leading deep down into a tomb of the late seventh century B.C. Two small lions of tufa-stone, almost crumbled away, guard the doorway with its squared blocks of masonry and its keystone set vertically in the top of the arch. When the tomb was first entered in the last century, there were still two skeletons lying on wooden slabs within. The dead men had with them some large jars (*amphorae*), a candelabra, a jug, and a three-legged vessel of *bucchero*-ware which may have been a charcoal-bucket to warm the hands, such as the Italian peasants still use today. But the most remarkable things in this tomb are its frescoes, which have already been mentioned as the earliest known evidence of Etruscan wall-painting. They have suffered much in the century since the opening of the tomb, but there are copies dating from their first discovery which have preserved for us the unreal, almost fabulous quality of the paintings. These hunting-scenes from a legendary world seem to have a strange senselessness about them that is oppressive, with their horses coloured half-brown and half-white, or marked with vivid blue spots, or shown with human heads and wings. The obvious reminiscence of Crete in these paintings could be accounted for by supposing a tradition brought by the Tyrrhenians from the Aegean; or equally it could be traced back to the model of Cypriot wall-hangings with their decorative themes of Cretan or Mycenaean origin.

There are innumerable other tombs round the hill of Veii, going right back into the Villanova period. They were in most cases opened and then filled up again. Many valuable pieces from the earliest cultural epoch of the Tyrrhenian people are derived from them. But there may still be painted vaults and ruined sanctuaries and masterpieces of statuary slumbering in the soil of the town, waiting for the spade to conjure the glory of a vanished culture up into the light of day again.

The island-cliff of Veii today stands desolate and silent. Time flows over it like an all-engulfing deluge. But in the Tiber valley lower down, eternal Rome had outspread beneath her domes, like gleaming moons. She has survived the downfall of the Roman Empire, the onslaughts of decay and war for thousands of years, imperishable; and she had long forgotten the mortal struggle with her proud and luckless rival, whose downfall was the beginning of her own unexampled rise to power.





Chapter Nine

THE HUMAN-HEADED URNS OF CLUSIUM

HISTORY has handed down the names of but few Etruscan kings and heroes. Their figures are left vague and featureless. King Porsenna of Camars (or Clusium, as the Romans later called it) is one of the few whose personality detaches itself in sharper outline from the background of that great epoch, so pregnant with destiny for Italy, in which the Tyrrhenians still stood at their peak, but on the brink of the slippery slope which was to end inexorably in their final downfall.

Reigning over Clusium in the second half of the sixth century B.C., Porsenna embodied over again in the eyes of the Romans all the centuries-old prestige of the Tyrrhenian kingdom. In Livy's remark that the name of Clusium alone was enough to make the Roman Senate tremble, there is not only an echo of the memory of the fearful defeat which Rome suffered at that city's hands after the expulsion of the Tarquins: the terror implicit in it is much more indicative of a surviving consciousness of inferiority, which the primitive Romans of the early period must have felt towards the spiritual and technical superiority of the Tyrrhenians. Their defeat at the hands of the ruler of Clusium undoubtedly touched the Romans to the quick, coming as it did just at the moment when they had begun to assert their individuality as a people by throwing off the domination of foreigners; so that their reversion to the old yoke was a terrible shock to their pride. The disaster was later embroidered and transfigured, so far as possible, by legends which skilfully

described how Porsenna had been induced to break off the siege of Rome by the heroic feats of Horatius Cocles, Mucius Scaevola, and Clelia. But in reality, as is shown by the accounts of Pliny and Tacitus, the Etruscan king took Rome by storm and reduced it again with all its territory under Tyrrhenian jurisdiction. His victory was so complete that he was able to debar the Romans from the use of iron, except for agriculture.

Etruscan as well as Roman legend has affected the figure of Porsenna. It is not only his feats of war that have been elaborated by legend: tradition has even preserved many personal features of this important monarch, to retain for posterity a vivid account of his typically Etruscan extravagance of character. The account of his sepulchral monument is particularly good evidence of his reckless passion for ostentation. Pliny quotes the following description by Varro:

King Porsenna lies buried under the town of Clusium, and has left a monument made of squared blocks of stone, 360 feet square and 60 feet high. In the rectangular equilateral foundations is to be found a labyrinth, from which it is impossible to find the way out without a thread. On these foundations stand five pyramids, four at the corners and one in the middle; each has a base 75 feet square, each is 150 feet high and each has a bronze globe on the top. Resting over all five is a layer of bronze, with bells hanging from it on chains, so that they sound with every breath of wind, just like the cauldron at Dodona of old. On this layer of bronze stand four more pyramids, each 100 feet high, and above these again on another base are five more.

Pliny adds that according to the Etruscan legends these last five were as high as the whole of the rest of the structure put together. With such extravagant folly did the builder seek to achieve immortality by means of perfectly useless expenditure; and thus did he squander the resources of the state for the glorification of an artist. The above description cannot be taken at its face value: it is fantastic as well as obscure. However, it shows clearly enough that the style

and scale of the king's mausoleum were sufficiently extraordinary to excite people's imaginative faculties for many centuries.

So far all attempts to find this enormous monument have been in vain. It is probably not correct to identify it with the funeral mound of *Poggio Gaiella*, four miles from present-day Chiusi, which has a perimeter of about 275 yards and consists of a large number of tombs built one on top of another in three stories. The legend speaks expressly of huge blocks of squared stone. It is known both from archaeological finds and from reliefs on cinerary urns that in fact monuments were frequently erected consisting of a stone base with a cone-shaped structure on it; and these, though not pyramids, might popularly have been described as such. It is also a remarkable coincidence that the description of the monument of Porsenna so closely recalls the archaic monument near Ariccia, traditionally known as the Mausoleum of Aruns (a son of Porsenna who was killed in the Latin-Etruscan battle at Ariccia), though the latter is on a more modest scale. It is still in good preservation, and consists of a high foundation of squared blocks supporting four massive obtuse cones of cut stone; and to this extent it undoubtedly corresponds to the type of tomb described by Pliny.

In any case, the legends about this building in which King Porsenna had his last abode give a lively picture of the cultural and political level attained by the city-state of Clusium. Tyrrhenian, Italian and probably even older stock here combined to produce a civilisation whose unique achievements were in some respects even more decisive for Italian culture (and specifically for that of Rome) than those of the coastal cities with their marked orientalising trend.

The neighbourhood of Chiusi, which today almost entirely covers the level occupied by the ancient Etruscan city, has been an inhabited area from earliest antiquity. From its oldest period some extraordinarily interesting finds have been made on the nearby Monte Cetonia, some 4000 feet high. Following the clue of a peasant tradition, a large cave was found at the top of the hill. This was popularly known as the "Milk Grotto," because it contained a

miraculous spring emanating from great stalactites shaped almost like a woman's breasts, the water from which was said to increase the milk of nursing mothers. The celebrity of this place seems to have reached back into darkest prehistory, and votive offerings were found here covering a period of at least four to five thousand years. The most recent was a rosary from the time of Pius IX; the most ancient was a crude earthenware vessel with a long spout ending in a bulge like a teat—no doubt a primitive milk-bottle for some baby born four or five thousand years ago. There are also numerous votive gifts from the Roman period, most of which consist of little terracotta figures of new-born infants. From the lowest level of the cave-floor, excavations have further brought to light the bones and skulls of cave-bears, together with tools from the early Stone Age. Presumably the cave was occupied by the original inhabitants of Italy, people of the old Mediterranean stock, who later gave way to Indo-European stock in the Bronze Age. The Villanova culture has also left relics in great quantity, not in the Milk Grotto but in the vicinity of Chiusi.

Here, where human beings had lived from the earliest times, the specifically Etruscan culture first unmistakably makes its appearance about the end of the eighth century. There is no other place where the suspicion that the Tyrrhenians may after all have been an indigenous Italian stock is more strongly reinforced than here in Clusium. Its culture is simultaneously marked by emphatically indigenous features and pregnant with the seed of all those trends which were later to be distinctive of Etruscan art in its entirety. No doubt it is a case of very ancient strains coming to the surface again; and it is also certainly possible that local individuality only developed properly at the fresh touch that the Tyrrhenians brought to it, just as elsewhere generally Etruscan culture fulfilled the function of awakening the dormant resources of the Italians. Etruscan art had various focal points, which correspond to the individuality of its various important centres; and it is consequently a synthesis of the Etruscan and the Italian—a product evolved on Italian soil and rightly therefore to be credited to it.

The place that Tarquinia occupied in the field of painting, and Veii in that of terracotta-ware, was taken by Camars in the field of portrait-sculpture, in which the artistic creativity of Etruria (as well as later of Rome) achieved its most powerful and superlative effects. Prompted by religious considerations, the attempt to preserve the personal features of the dead is to be found in very early sculptural fragments, such as the funeral *stelae* from Vetulonia. Camars, however, created an entirely independent form, related to its local burial customs, in the type of vase known as "Canopic" after an Egyptian original.

The Canopic vases are pot-bellied vessels of earthenware or bronze, generally with handles, in which the ashes of the dead were stored. The top does not, however, consist merely of a lid, or of a helmet set at an angle, as in the case of the Villanovan cinerary urns: it is a globular covering, onto which at the earliest period a human mask was fitted. From this followed in due course a gradual adaptation of the whole cinerary vessel to the human form. The covering was transformed into a plastic representation of a head; the pot-bellied container came to represent the body, and the handles became arms. Thus gradually the whole was turned into a portrait of the dead person, though at first only in a crudely schematic form.

Archaeologists have not yet reached agreement on the question whether the convention of the Canopic vase was evolved on the spot, or introduced by the Tyrrhenians, or whether it goes back to an old Indo-European tradition which the representatives of the Villanova culture brought with them on their arrival in Italy. The circumstance that the only counterparts to the Canopic vases have been found in the Balkans is to some extent evidence for the last hypothesis, if one adopts the view that the Villanova people came into Italy from the lower Danube basin. Moreover, the fact that the oldest bronze masks from Camars show an extraordinary resemblance to the gold death-masks discovered in the shaft-graves at Mycenae may be taken as evidence for the Indo-European origin of the custom of transferring to the ashes of the dead the likeness of the person to whom

they belonged. Again, the funeral customs of the Etruscans show marked signs of Mycenaean influence all along, and these could at once be accounted for on the hypothesis of an Aegean origin of the Etruscans. But this complicated question becomes even more perplexing when it is remembered that particular reliance is placed on the finds at Chiusi by the theory which holds the representatives of the Villanova culture to have been not Indo-Europeans but Proto-Etruscans. This theory is by no means unrealistic, since it is precisely at Camars more than anywhere else that the Etruscan and the Villanova cultures appear to be most closely related. The earliest Canopic vases, for instance, are invariably found in shaft-graves, which also contain funeral gifts characteristic of the Villanova culture. It is above all in Chiusi, therefore, under the fixed, enigmatic gaze of the Canopic vases standing on their bronze or earthenware thrones in the town museum, that the riddle of the Tyrrhenian stock begins to seem more insoluble than ever.

A religion based on the worship of ancestors and the departed gave rise to the necessity of preserving in this life some relic of the dead; and this is the origin of the artistic naturalism of the Tyrrhenians. The commemorative picture which the Greeks used to make of a dead celebrity has nothing in common with the Etruscans' ancestral portrait; for, as its purpose required, it was not naturalistic but idealised. The Greeks' interest in portraiture in the proper sense did not emerge until a late date, and the Tyrrhenians have an unquestionable priority in this field of art.

In the majority of cases the dead persons represented in the Canopic vases of Chiusi were men. On the earliest of them the bronze mask was still fitted over the plastic model of the features, as is shown by the numerous little pock-marks still to be seen on them. One of the characteristics of these faces, as of all later Etruscan portraiture, in contrast to that of the Greeks, is that their composition seems to spring not from organic nature, but as it were from abstract geometrical form. Their formal structure is almost crystalline, being composed of comparatively few straight lines and broad surfaces,

with a curiously impressive effect that is decorative rather than plastic. The oldest heads date back to the eighth century B.C., or even further according to some scholars: the modelling technique is naturally primitive, and the features have the stiff formality of masks; but as early as the seventh century, a few of them clearly show the artist trying to achieve a realistic representation of the dead man's features, and to catch the exact structure of his physiognomy. (Plate 34.)

A warrior's head from the sixth century (by the end of which the use of these urns also came to an end) shows an almost uncanny expressive power, with its haughty poise and the harsh curve of its mouth above the powerful chin, and its deepset eyes. (Plate 33.) There is a single, broad, direct line of development from this to the bronze head in the Capitoline Museum at Rome known as the portrait of the elder Brutus, one of the most splendid and moving works of art left to us from the ancient world. Even this mature work, from the highly sophisticated period of the fourth century B.C., still obeys the earlier rule of composing the face out of the simplest stereometric forms. But how skilfully the Etruscan artist has now learned to adapt this medium of expression to depict the character of a human being, and through it even to portray the drama of life itself! (Plate 29.)

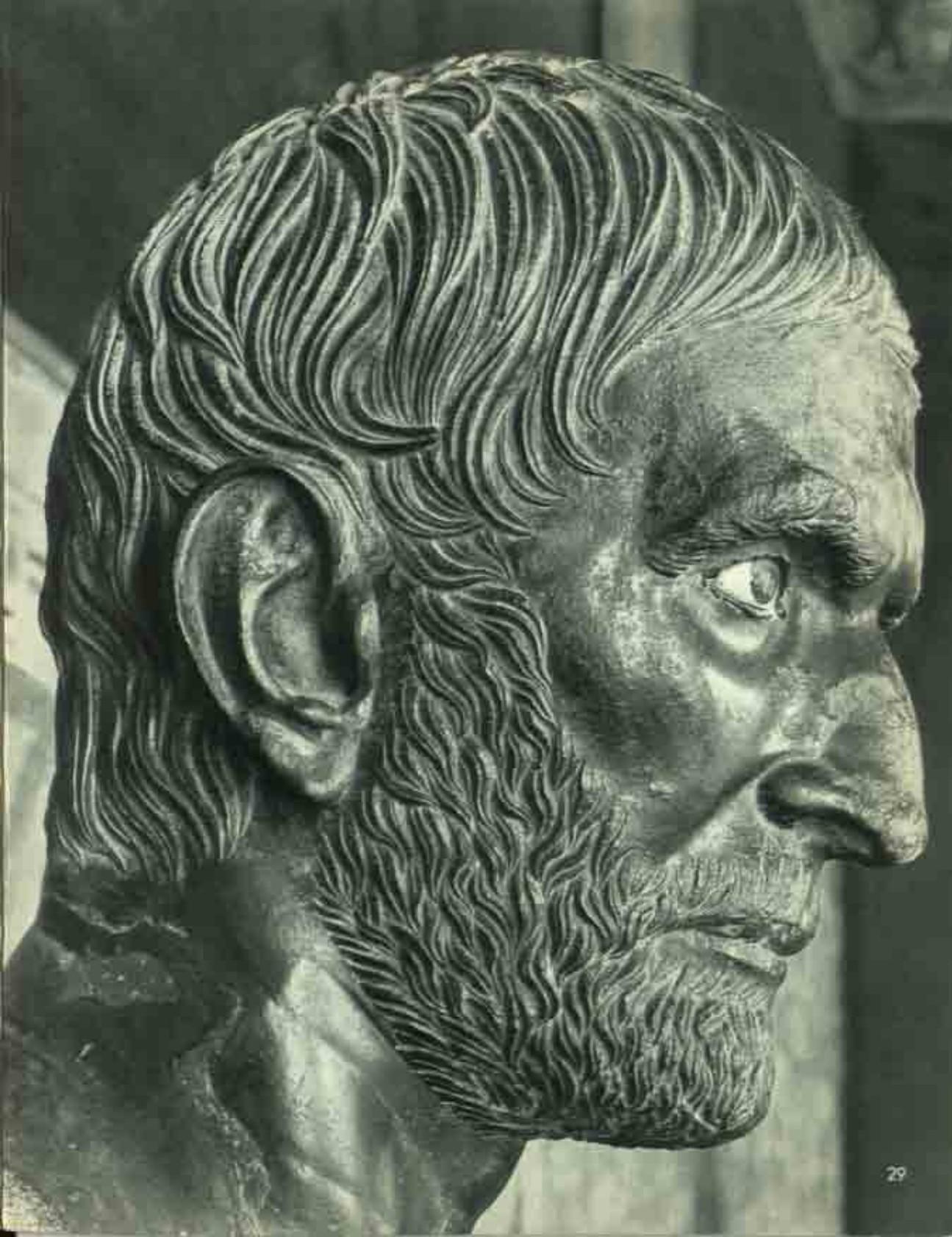
Round the tightly closed lips of this unforgettable face, with its introspective gaze, lies the deep melancholy of experience. There is an unbending will and spirit in the prominent forehead above the broad brows and in the forceful lines of the aristocratic nose. The curious treatment of the beard and hair, with its pattern like little tongues of flame, is reminiscent of the typically stylised manes of Etruscan lions; and this again shows the old-fashioned taste for the decorative. Despite the extreme intensity of the figure it is entirely without pathos or sentiment, and the dry quality of the portrait entirely lacks the idealistic features of Greek art as well as the pure realism of Roman portrait-sculpture, with its intimate relation to the wax death-mask. Etruscan naturalism has an entirely spiritual orientation: it is more concerned with the psychological make-up

and the character of the individual than with an outward likeness of him. It is an art fundamentally more related to the Gothic and the early Renaissance than to the time of Pericles; and in some respects it is actually a forerunner of our own modern portraiture, the principles of which are astonishingly close to it.

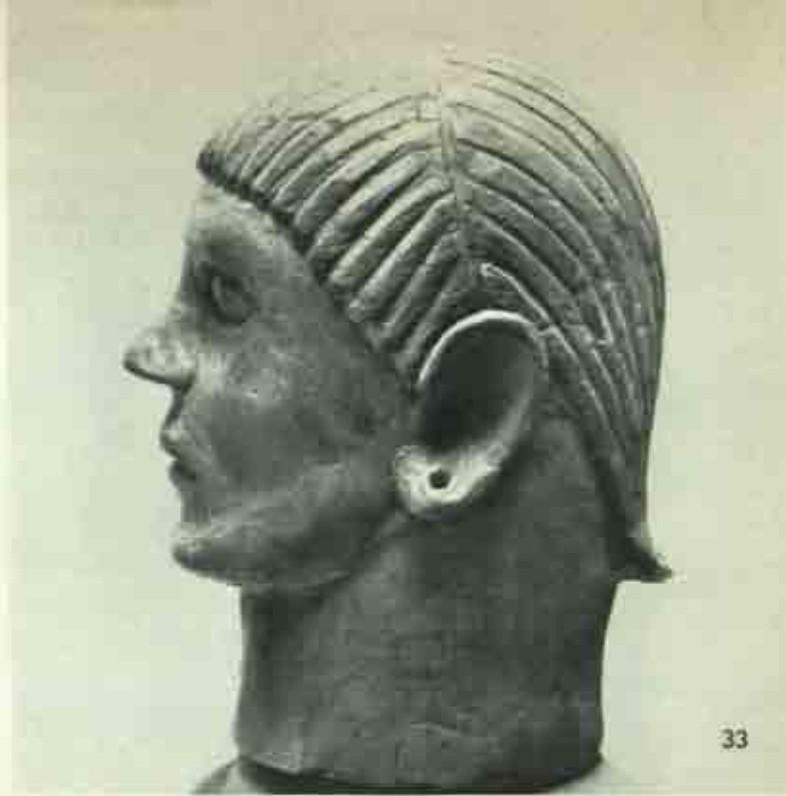
The affinity between Tyrrhenian bronze-work and that of the early Renaissance in Tuscany is impressively illustrated in particular by a youthful head to be found in the Museum at Florence. This is an Etruscan work dated a few decades later than the head of Brutus, but it has in common the same treatment of the hair and the same general handling of the material. Its rather severe charm and composure are strongly reminiscent of the austere grace of a Donatello or a Desiderio da Settignano. It cannot be said with certainty how far the revival of some primitive stimulus, such as may constantly be traced in the Tuscan Renaissance, can be linked with the direct study of ancient works of art. Certainly working artists of this period were tremendously impressed by finds such as the *Chimaera*. There is a drawing by Michelangelo showing the Etruscan god of death with a wolf-helmet, which proves that the great master not only knew of Etruscan frescoes but had also submitted them to stylistic analysis. Similarly, at a later date, Piranesi spoke of the Etruscan tomb-paintings with admiration and delight. But it may be that there was a more powerful factor in the Tuscan Renaissance than the study of ancient works of art; a creative tradition in the blood, a spiritual predisposition surviving in the unconscious, which was transmitted to the descendants of what had once been Etruria by the soil that gave them birth, soaked as it was in the culture of the past.

The Tyrrhenian people retained its talent for portraiture to the last day of its existence as a nation. When painting, craftsmanship and pottery had all fallen to a low level, portraits of outstanding quality were still being produced. In some of them Etruscan naturalism was exaggerated to the point of brutality, and even of grotesque caricature. The habit of turning the gaze inwards and backwards, which was the spiritual characteristic of the people and their art in the later

29. Bronze head known as the elder Brutus (third century B.C.).
30. Bronze dancer, probably part of a candelabrum.
- 31 and 32. Small bronze votive figure, wearing a *tutulus* on its head.







33



34

period, found expression in the last two centuries of their national existence in a resuscitation of artistic trends from the past. Just as in the Canopic vases, almost five centuries earlier, all the artist's attention was concentrated on the face, so now in the final phase of funerary sculpture all interest in the body was so completely abandoned that in the cinerary urns, for instance, it is indicated only in the most casual and schematic form. On the tiny bodies, generally poorly proportioned, is set a large head of extraordinary vitality, unmistakably intended as a portrait-study of the dead man. Here we can see a reversion to the oldest conception of obituary portraiture. The Canopic vases, however, underwent a quite different development during the fifth century, in the direction of physical representation, which culminated in the seated statues with the remains of the dead enclosed inside them. In the vicinity of Chiusi such funerary statues have been found in considerable numbers. They mostly represent women, and are characterised by a melancholy gravity of expression and a certain monumental massiveness.

Etruscan portraiture had a lasting influence on that of the Romans. In the last analysis, the finest flower of Augustan art was fertilised neither by the magical realism of the early ancestral portraits of the Romans, with their photographic precision modelled on the death-mask, nor by the Greeks with their endless striving after an ideal image. It is rather the old Italian-Etruscan tradition that finds its fulfilment in the formal simplicity and boldness, the dignity and intensity of the finest period of Roman art. This is wonderfully apparent in the great bronze statue of the Tyrrhenian magistrate Aule Metele (known as "the orator"), which was found in Lake Trasimene and now stands in the Archaeological Museum at Florence. It synthesises in an impressive combination the tradition of Etruria and the spirit of Rome; and with the solemn, eloquent gesture of its half-raised arm and the calm dignity of the strong, clear features of its face, it may be regarded as an embodiment of the new Roman world that was rising out of the Etruscan past.

It is true that later on, in the last centuries of Roman antiquity, it

33. Canopic vase from Clusium bearing a warrior's head (sixth century B.C.).

34. Primitive Canopic vase from Clusium (eighth century B.C.).

was hellenism that played the leading part in determining Rome's artistic evolution. However, towards the end of the third century A.D. a curious phenomenon came about; the Etruscan conception of portraiture broke through again in full force and completely ousted the Greek influence. And so in this decisive period, when a new world was beginning to take shape against the background of antiquity's crumbling ruins, the ancient Italian genius once more threw its weight into the scales, to make its own creative contribution to the formation of this new world and of Western civilisation itself.

It was by no means only in the sphere of portraiture and the plastic arts that Clusium has important achievements to its credit, for it also produced craftsmanship of a high order. Its *bucchero* vases are particularly notable for the barbaric strength as well as the quaintness of their appearance. These were produced at Clusium from the seventh century B.C. onwards in such large quantities and with such a distinctive form that Camars has come to be regarded as the original home of this gleaming, polished pottery, whose black texture is due to impregnation of the clay with charcoal. (Plates 36 to 39.)

Bucchero vases are also to be found in the cities of the dead near the coast, but not in such numbers. These latter have a light, well-baked texture which looks almost metallic, whilst those from Camars are naturally heavier and thicker, being also more lightly baked. Their production begins in the seventh century B.C. and ends about the fourth. The *buccheri* again suggest links with Asia Minor, and especially with Cyprus, where similar terracottas were produced: so here again the question arises, how far foreign influences were at work. If such was the case, it was nevertheless a matter primarily of technical influences, for the pottery of Camars, with its massive shapes and overloaded decoration, reveals exactly the same spirit that gave birth to the monument of Porsenna. An especially marked feature of the *buccheri* of Chiusi is the embossed relief of figures or animals, produced either from a matrix or by rolling a cylinder across the surface; similarly the decoration of the lids and rims of the pots

with human and animal figures and heads. Many of these pots also have incised drawings on them, the lines of which are filled in with a white substance; and the eccentric and remarkable shapes of these, which no doubt derive from some prehistoric symbolism, still further heighten the strange and brilliant effect of the pots, with their empty, staring features or their fabulous creatures rearing up to spring, or their hieratic figures in relief, representing Greek myths or dances or religious processions. The lids of these vessels are often topped by a cock or a pigeon—no doubt a cult-symbol, perhaps of the soul represented as a bird. Magic talismans may well have been hidden among the jewellery in many of these jugs, bowls and vases that were buried with the dead, often in great numbers. In many cases a complete range of articles has been found laid out on a heavy earthenware tray in the grave, no doubt to serve some sacramental purpose.

In the Museum at Chiusi there is a very large earthenware cinerary urn of the early seventh century, which gives the impression of a survival from a prehistoric world of magic. On its lid stands a female figure with a disproportionately large head. She wears a lattice-work garment, more like chain-mail than cloth, and a mantle over her back; and her hair is done in stiff locks framing a face set with large, black eyes. In the right hand was a pomegranate (now lost), the identifying mark of the goddess of the dead; while the left hand is lifted to the lips in a mysterious gesture, as if commanding silence. Fine gold rings still hang from the ears. The head has an uncanny and grotesque effect. Round this primeval goddess of death a double row of mourning women hurl themselves wildly into a macabre dance. Between them gryphons rear their heads out of the lid, with long necks and gaping beaks, as if threatening anyone who seeks to desecrate the hallowed ashes within. This vessel was found in one of the so-called *tombe a zirro*, a type of burial characteristic of Camars in the early archaic period, in which the remains of the dead were lowered into the earth with the funerary gifts in a huge earthenware container. This funeral custom belongs to approximately the same date as the trench-graves in the coastal capitals. Later the dead at

Camars had the same spacious resting-places hewn out of the rock as in any of the other towns of Etruria.

Of the buildings above ground in the inland Etruscan towns nothing remains but the traces of a few walls here and there; but underneath, the soil of modern Chiusi is virtually hollow. A labyrinth of subterranean passages from the Tyrrhenian period spreads out to the furthest limits of the town and even considerably further, running through the earth like an ant-heap. Presumably they belonged to the defensive system of Camars: today most of them are used as cellars. Recently a monastery document led to the discovery thirty feet beneath the cathedral-square of a large room supported by a pillar. An oval-shaped vault of remarkable workmanship, fitted together out of regularly cut Travertine blocks, covered the space, which was no doubt used as a cistern. Of all the splendid buildings of King Porsenna's residence, all that has survived is that part which was buried in the depths of the rock.

Yet even if Camars has vanished, life has never ceased here as it did on the Tyrrhenian coast. Death and disintegration have never touched this fertile landscape of vineyards, which was first drained and cultivated by the Etruscans. Pale olive-groves still wreath the green slopes. Large and ancient peasant houses intersperse the luxuriant vineyards; and often there are Etruscan gravestones shaped like pine-cones to be seen on their roof-tops. With the same unaffected naturalness, Tyrrhenian cinerary urns have been built into the walls of houses here and there as corner-stones; or sarcophagi, with worn inscriptions still to be seen on them, are used as cattle-troughs.

The tombs of the Etruscans at Clusium lie like friendly little homesteads in the heart of the pleasant hills. Many of them, such as the "Tomb of the Grand Duke," have fine barrel vaults made of long, closely fitted blocks of Travertine stone; and on the stone ledges round the once brilliantly painted walls, there still stand the cinerary coffers, with wonderful representations of the dead on their lids.

The most intimate and charming of all the habitations of the dead

lies beneath the roots of a gigantic pine. It has a heavy door of Travertine, the leaves of which still move with perfect ease on their strong pivots fitted into sockets in the rock above and below. (Plate 42.) The door opens with a gentle rumble onto the *atrium* of the subterranean house. In the early afternoon the slanting rays of the sun penetrate into the interior of this tomb, which is known as the *Tomba Casuccini*. The warm glow entirely fills the main chamber, and it seems to shed its 2500 years, as if it had been got ready only yesterday for the reception of a living couple. The colours of the wall-paintings gleam fresh and unfaded; the lines and edges of the imitation ceiling-beams, carved out of stone with the coffers skilfully cut out and painted, are in perfect condition. (The same technique is found later in Tuscan Renaissance palaces.) Round the room runs a broad painted frieze. It dates from the beginning of the fifth century, when archaic painting had already achieved a perfect mastery over all its formulae and had learned to relax into an effortless elegance. Lean-flanked horses with small, thoroughbred heads gallop along in chariot-races, driven by graceful boys. The relatives of the departed recline at a cheerful banquet with them, enjoying the games and dancing of the young people, both boys and girls. One of the dancing girls is of an extraordinarily graceful and compelling beauty, with her rich black curls beautifully dressed in a style reminiscent of mediaeval pages. The colours of the paint, which was applied direct to the rock without preparation, have stood up to the passage of time astonishingly well. The *atrium* was probably intended exclusively for ceremonies in honour of the departed; and behind it lies a single chamber with two ledges—the bed-chamber of the dead couple, where they were finally united in eternal rest. The frescoes, which are badly faded, show naked boys making music as they move about through a grove of little olive-trees. Possibly they are guiding the spirits of the dead through the Elysian fields.

Apart from the *Tomba Casuccini* there is only one other painted tomb, among those that have been found at different dates at Chiusi, in which the wall-paintings are in a good state of preservation. This

is a tomb lying buried at a great depth in the hillside. Its proper entrance has never been found, but in the course of digging a vertical shaft was found, which the Etruscans had no doubt constructed for technical reasons or for later burials. For many years this was the only approach to the vault, until a brick-lined staircase was eventually constructed, leading down twenty-seven steps into the spacious sepulchre of four separate chambers. The wall-paintings are again mainly confined to the first room, which is comparatively large. They are somewhat coarse in outline and colour: they might almost be called rustic; and there is a rusticity too about the naïve and primitive vitality of expression in the subjects of the pictures. The scene on the walls is something like a public holiday: a colourful throng at a fair, with jugglers, wrestlers, acrobats, a performing ape, and even a dwarf. The dead person, in whose honour all this activity is going on, sits watching the spectacle with a dignified expression, on a chair fitted with a foot-rest, under the protection of a flat sunshade. The paintings in this vault, known as the "Tomb of the Ape," show the same powerful and original talent that characterises the Canopic and *bucchero* vases and the massive but expressive works of statuary.

Whatever the indigenous art of Camars may lack in elegance and refinement, when compared with that of the coastal states, it makes up by the power and immediacy of the creative inspiration which finds expression in it. It is because this art is so natural, even if it cannot be called beautiful, that it makes so strong and enduring an impression. The features of Western man become visible for the first time in the Canopic vases of Clusium; they are the beginning of a development which has not yet reached its conclusion in the European art of today.

Chapter Ten

LANDSCAPE AND SOCIETY IN THE HEART OF ETRURIA

To this day, the route into the heart of Etruria still leads through the narrow pass of Sutri. It is a landscape coruscated with crater-shaped lakes, a scene enriched with the two inseparable aspects of wildness and of peace. The pass lies almost exactly equidistant between Lake Bracciano and Lake Vico, in a spur of the wooded hill of Cimino. Up to this point the landscape is almost flat and monotonous, though it has charm. At this point there suddenly begin to open up steep gorges with torrential streams pouring down them. Here and there huge platforms of rock rise up out of the level plain, with dilapidated habitations squatting on top of them; and on one such stands Sutri, once the scene of so desperate a struggle, on a rocky islet eroded by the confluence of two torrential streams.

The basic colour of Etruria is the dark, incandescent red-brown of tufa-stone, against which the moist green of fields and trees in the spring, and the autumn gold of the chestnut woods, are intensified to an almost unreal brilliance. It is this that endows the landscape with its peculiarly full-blooded beauty. In the course of thousands of years the water has brought out a superbly severe architectural quality in the stone sides of the valley, many of whose smooth lines and curves might have been shaped by an artist's hand. No other stone submits so readily to the will of man or nature as this volcanic tufa, which has almost the vitality and pliancy of the soil itself—a red soil, rather hard, but one that nourishes, one that enfolds the dead like seed to give birth to a new life.

Out of this stone the cities of the dead and living Tyrrhenians derived a wonderfully organic life. Its conformation provided the foundation of every building: the cyclopean masonry of the Etruscans was generally no more than the completion of natural bastions already there; and their tombs are often adaptations of caves in the valley-slopes or of the shapes of cairns formed by landslides, or even of the peculiar conformation of a particular valley. Even Sutri today, with its dark, congested houses held together by the remains of former Etruscan fortifications, seems like a structure growing out of the cliff, where men have settled themselves only in the capacity of guests.

The modern town may well be of approximately the same size as when it guarded the approach to inland Etruria. But practically nothing has survived of the fortifications of the ancient frontier-post, and Roman history has even suppressed the name of its valiant defenders. Only the name of its Roman conqueror, Furius Camillus, the first great adversary of the Tyrrhenians, is still perpetuated in one of the ancient gateways of the town, the *Porta Furia*.

Here too, as everywhere else in Etruria, the dead have left deeper traces behind them than the living. Their funerary grottoes gape in long rows on the valley-slopes. The triangular gables carved in relief over their entrances still show traces of their former architectural ornamentation. A dim recollection that these were once consecrated places may be the reason why the inhabitants of Sutri have hung sacred pictures on some of these gables. Admittedly, in other places the habitations of the dead have been sacrilegiously converted into cattle-stalls or store-rooms; but in these remote parts of inland Etruria there certainly still survives something of the tradition, stretching far back into prehistory and surviving throughout antiquity even into the Middle Ages, of the sacredness of such places.

The superstition of some intrinsic "power" in a particular place, which has its roots in pre-deistic conceptions and has been the motive for the establishment of most sanctuaries, survives even in the Christian era. It was a matter of deliberate policy, not an accident, that in the Middle Ages churches were built for preference on the site of

35. Bronze Canopic vase from the Dolciano tomb surmounted by a terracotta head.
36. Pyx, *bucchero* in relief (sixth century B.C.).
37. Dish, *bucchero* in relief (first half of the sixth century B.C.).
38. Brazier, *bucchero* in relief, from Clusium (sixth century B.C.).





36



37



38





pagan places of worship; and it was only the rationalism of the Renaissance that deliberately destroyed the links of mystical tradition reaching right back into primitive times. According to the new conception then introduced, it was no longer the sacredness of the place that led to the building of a church, but the presence of the house of God that sanctified the spot on which it stood.

In its sanctuary of the *Madonna del parto*, which was converted from an Etruscan *hypogaeon* into a church, Sutri possesses a very curious example of the Christian extension of a pagan tradition. A spacious and extensive tomb, probably dating from the late Etruscan period with its mass-burials, has here been turned into a church in the rock. The Tyrrhenian goddess of death, Tufltha, has thus surrendered her hegemony over this melancholy spot to a gentle Madonna, the guardian of women in childbirth.

The layout of the former sepulchre has been almost completely preserved. Only a few window-openings have been cut through the rock, which is three feet thick, to admit a feeble light into the sanctuary. There is an ante-room, with traces of faded frescoes in the Byzantine style still clinging to the walls; and behind it opens a narrow vault ending in a painted apse—a kind of primitive basilica, divided into three aisles by two rows of short and crudely shaped pillars. There can still be seen the ledges on which the Tyrrhenians once laid out their corpses, cut out of the rock like the pillars; and even the crumbling bones of the Etruscan dead were left undisturbed in the ante-room. So the pagan and the Christian meet in peace under the gentle smile of the Mother of God, and the continuity of things of the spirit is uninterrupted.

Above the cliff of tufa-stone, which contains these graves within it, the park of a dilapidated baroque villa has run wild; and there is yet another work of Etruscan architecture to be found in it—a wide amphitheatre, with its tiers of seats and covered passage-ways cut straight out of the rock. There is much controversy about the date of this structure; but it seems to have been made fairly late, probably under Roman domination. However, there are all the marks of

39. *Buccheri* in relief shaped like a leg (sixth century B.C.).

40. *Statuette* of a woman (sixth century B.C.).

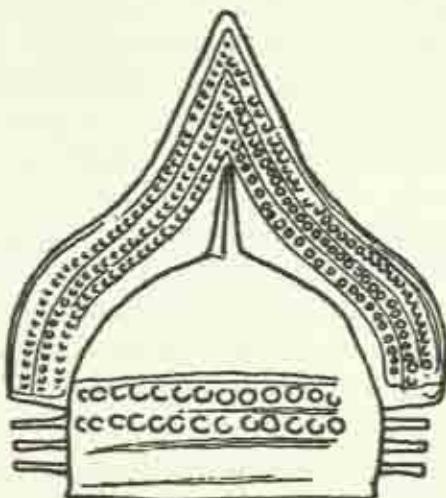
Tyrrhenian technique in its construction, which is entirely without mortar and almost exclusively cut out of the native rock. The steps of the graceful oval enclosure are crumbling, having been eroded by rain and overgrown with grass; and spreading holm-oaks shade the outer perimeter. (Plate 45.)

Here, thousands of years ago, the inhabitants of the numerous settlements used to assemble to attend the funeral games in honour of the distinguished dead. In Rome under the Caesars these solemn games degenerated into ceremonies in honour of the chthonian deities, with the horrors of primitive human sacrifice mitigated into mortal combats between the condemned victims; and finally into crude spectacles designed to gratify the bloodthirsty instincts of the populace. There was only one surviving custom, recorded by Tertullian, to recall what had once been the sacramental significance of these exhibitions. He describes the entry of special functionaries wearing masks of Hermes and Dispater, when the death of the gladiators was confirmed, as if to conduct the souls of the fallen to the other world. The Hermes carried a red-hot iron, and the Dispater a hammer, like the Etruscan Charu, the herald and executioner of death. In all probability, therefore, his original model was a demon or god of the Etruscan underworld.

In the Middle Ages Sutri still enjoyed a certain importance, thanks to its advantageous position on the *Via Cassia*. In the eighth century A.D., it came into the possession of the Church, which held a number of councils here. The Emperor Barbarossa once rested on its rocky slopes, when he came here to meet Pope Hadrian IV.

But today the little town seems no more than a piece of jetsam gently drifting on the shore, as it were some relic of a ship swallowed up in the ocean of time. Only a legend laps round it still, like the ebbing wave of a storm that has long subsided. There is not a scar left to bear witness to the mortal struggles that Romans and Tyrrhenians here fought out to the bitter end. Tradition records how at one time Sutri was twice taken and lost again on a single day; and even the Etruscan priests put themselves at the head of their troops in

the course of the conflict, brandishing flaming torches and live snakes in a fanatical fury, to overpower the Romans with terror and drive them headlong. Nevertheless the Romans' methodical strategy, their combination of audacity and coolness finally carried the day against the desperate courage of the Tyrrhenians. There is a stone tablet on



8. *Archaic helmet*

Monte Cimino, 4000 feet high with a primeval forest of beeches crowning its summit like a pillared cathedral, to commemorate the spot at which the Roman army broke through the supposedly impenetrable mountain wilderness and thereby carved itself a way into the heart of Etruria.

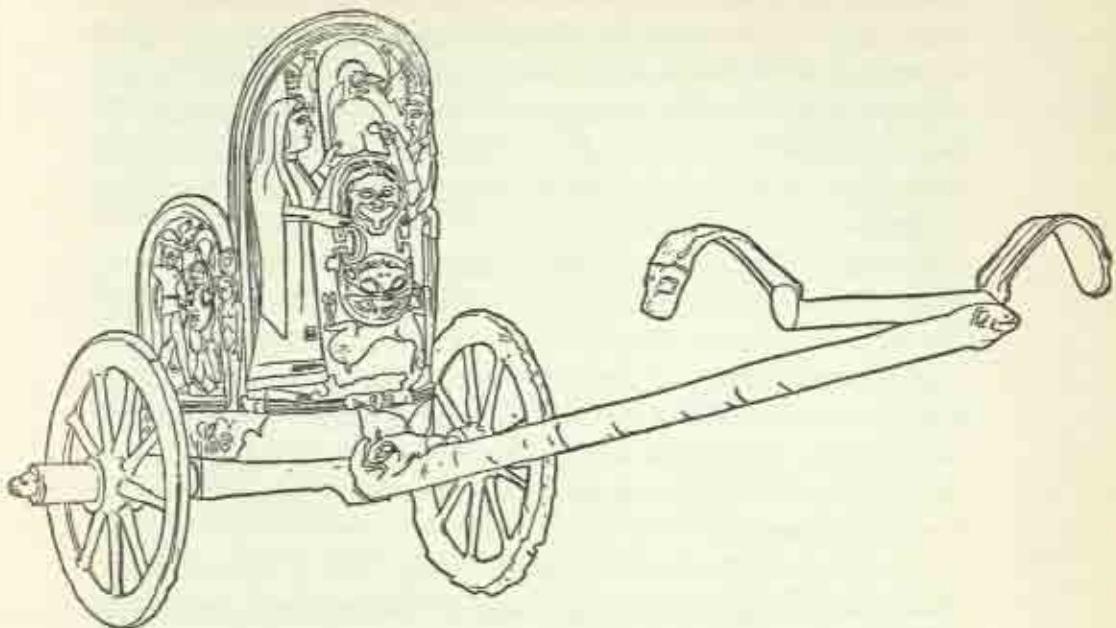
By that date it was long since the Romans had had anything to learn from the Tyrrhenians about the art of war. Three centuries earlier it had been otherwise, when the Etruscans first entered Italian history with a highly complicated military equipment and an advanced technique of war developed from oriental models, and submitted the Romans, who were still completely without training in military discipline, to their first crushing lesson in warfare. The

Etruscan names of Rome's oldest tribes (*Ramnes*, *Titientes* and *Luceres*) bear further witness to the fact that the Romans were indebted to the Tyrrhenians for their earliest military organisation: tradition actually ascribes it to King Servius Tullius. What the Romans learned above all from the Etruscans was to fight from a fixed position in closed ranks, as well as the use of the war-chariot and the phalanx of spears. Even the Roman cavalry was built up with horses from the celebrated Etruscan studs.

The variety of the Etruscans' military armament is reflected in the multiplicity of formations in their army. The most diverse forms of helmet are to be found among the funerary gifts in very early tombs. Among the varieties of circular bronze helmet made locally, often equipped with movable flanges to cover the neck and cheeks or with a spike and a tall, triangular, tapering crest, there were also Corinthian helmets in use, with horse-tails or plumes set in their tops. The Tyrrhenian armoury also included large shields, round or oval, decorated in concentric rings; and breast-plates, shields for the arms and legs, long spears and javelins, short heavy sabres, rapiers, daggers, crossbows and the double-axe, the legendary weapon of the Mediterranean world. The armour of the principal leaders was often of the highest artistic workmanship. Embossed designs, fabulous beasts, and even mythological scenes containing numerous figures, decorated their helmets, shields, and war-chariots in rich profusion. In the Metropolitan Museum at New York is an almost undamaged war-chariot of the middle of the sixth century B.C. found near Spoleto, which ranks among the finest pieces of archaic metalwork still preserved. The front of this magnificent vehicle of war shows Thetis giving Achilles his weapons; the two sides show a man in a war-chariot drawn by winged horses, and a scene of battle. It is a combination of superb composition, astonishing realism, and the finest execution. (Plates 46 and 47.)

A ringing blast of horns and trumpet (which is said by Greek writers to have been invented by the Tyrrhenians) used to accompany the armoured Etruscan horsemen into battle; and in the costly

ornamentation of their equipment, on their brightly gleaming chariots of bronze, they must have seemed almost like the figures of gods to the still half-civilised tribes of Italy.



9. *The chariot of Spoleto*

Thanks to the arterial highway of the *Via Cassia*, Sutri is still not excluded from the rhythm of the life of today. Away from the great highway, the Etruscan countryside stretches out behind Sutri in all its lonely beauty. The Tyrrhenians had made this the soil of a rich cultural colonisation; but after their downfall its vitality gradually oozed away out of it. The flourishing, fortified towns above the gorges of tufa-rock declined and fell; the wilderness quietly covered them up; the earth that had been so fertile became desert or swamp, once the irrigation system was neglected. But the dead in their rock-hewn tombs lay changeless where they were.

Of all the hills that were once inhabited by the Tyrrhenians, only a fraction are still occupied today. Hardly any of these old villages,

built above the ruins of the Roman and Etruscan tombs, can be seen from a distance. Such is the setting of the Etruscan landscape: its true character lies hidden behind a mask, reminiscent of the enigmatically smiling features of an archaic work of art, behind which the primitive savage still slumbers, hardly yet brought under restraint. From a distance, they look like no more than a series of bare, gently undulating plateaux: there is nothing to betray the gaping crevices, the primeval labyrinth of the valleys of the dead that run through and through the rock, to protect the crags on which men have built their settlements.

Barbarano Romano is one such village, like the sinister eyrie of a bird of prey on an impregnable precipice. The houses, packed chaotically into each other, date mostly from the fifteenth century. Their cuboid shape and their steep outside-staircases still give them the appearance of being derived from the Etruscan house, the very similar shape of which is still preserved in the quadrangular mausoleum of Caere, already described, as well as in the country graves of a nearby necropolis.

The people of Barbarano Romano know little of the world outside. The placid, earth-bound cycle of their existence has hardly changed since time immemorial. Half-naked children stare at the strangers who often find their way here, with the look of wild animals, shy and at the same time tense. The men are gaunt and taciturn: in their deep-set eyes lies the resignation of a poverty that has remained unchanged for thousands of years. Towards evening the women gather in almost motionless groups, enveloped in black dresses with black kerchiefs round their heads, looking like flocks of dark and silent birds.

The main street of the village leads to the furthest edge of the cliff, where it falls vertically in a precipice. Here no doubt the Etruscan citadel once stood. The ground is still a network of subterranean vaults, which may once have served as store-rooms or dungeons, and today give shelter to grunting pigs.

History and tradition are more or less unknown conceptions to

these villagers; but they have preserved many of the customs of a forgotten pagan antiquity without knowing their origin. This countryside, which in Tyrrhenian times evolved so magnificent a worship of the dead, still has many ways of honouring the memory of its departed. In Barbarano and nearby Vetralla, large portraits of the dead are solemnly carried on All Souls' Day, decked in flowers, to the graveyards, where a curious ceremony is conducted which may well carry echoes of an Etruscan custom of lamentation for the dead. What happens is that a few of the old women of the village, specially chosen for the occasion, call on the dead by name in loud voices, and conduct a dialogue with them in which they deliver the responses as well as the questions. The dead are asked how they are faring and what they desire; they are consoled, should they be languishing in purgatory. God and the Devil are often included in these dialogues in a curiously comic fashion. When it is over, these intermediaries between this world and the next are able to assure the bereaved, with all possible conviction, that their departed relatives are now sure to participate soon in the joys of Paradise.

There is another highly poetic belief in this village, that on All Souls' night the dead walk across the countryside in an illuminated procession. So at this time there must be oil in every graveside lamp; otherwise the luckless dead will have to pass before their Lord unnoticed, without a light in their hands.

At Bieda, near Barbarano, on the probable site of Etruscan Blera, children under nine years of age go round on November 1st to collect the *carità per i morti*, or gifts of victuals for the dead. Here again there is perhaps a reflection of the ancient Etruscan conception of the dead as craving for oblations of food.

The Tyrrhenian custom of *devotio*, or imprecatory magic, is also still secretly practised here almost in its original form. The Etruscan method was to pronounce it while burying in the earth an inscribed tablet, on which the execrated individual was consigned to the gods and demons of the underworld. A considerable number of such tablets has been brought to light by archaeological research. Today

the formula of imprecation is no longer set out in writing by the descendants of the Etruscans, but pronounced instead over certain objects belonging to the person to be cursed, which are then buried in the earth and so delivered to those below. This is supposed to give the forces of evil control over their owner. The ancient Tyrrhenian belief in the powers of the depths is clearly to be detected in the macabre superstition behind this ritual. The study of popular customs in Italy is unfortunately still in its infancy, though it is a field where much valuable knowledge can be gained, and isolated areas like the heart of Etruria or the Abruzzi still preserve a large number of peculiar customs from remote antiquity.

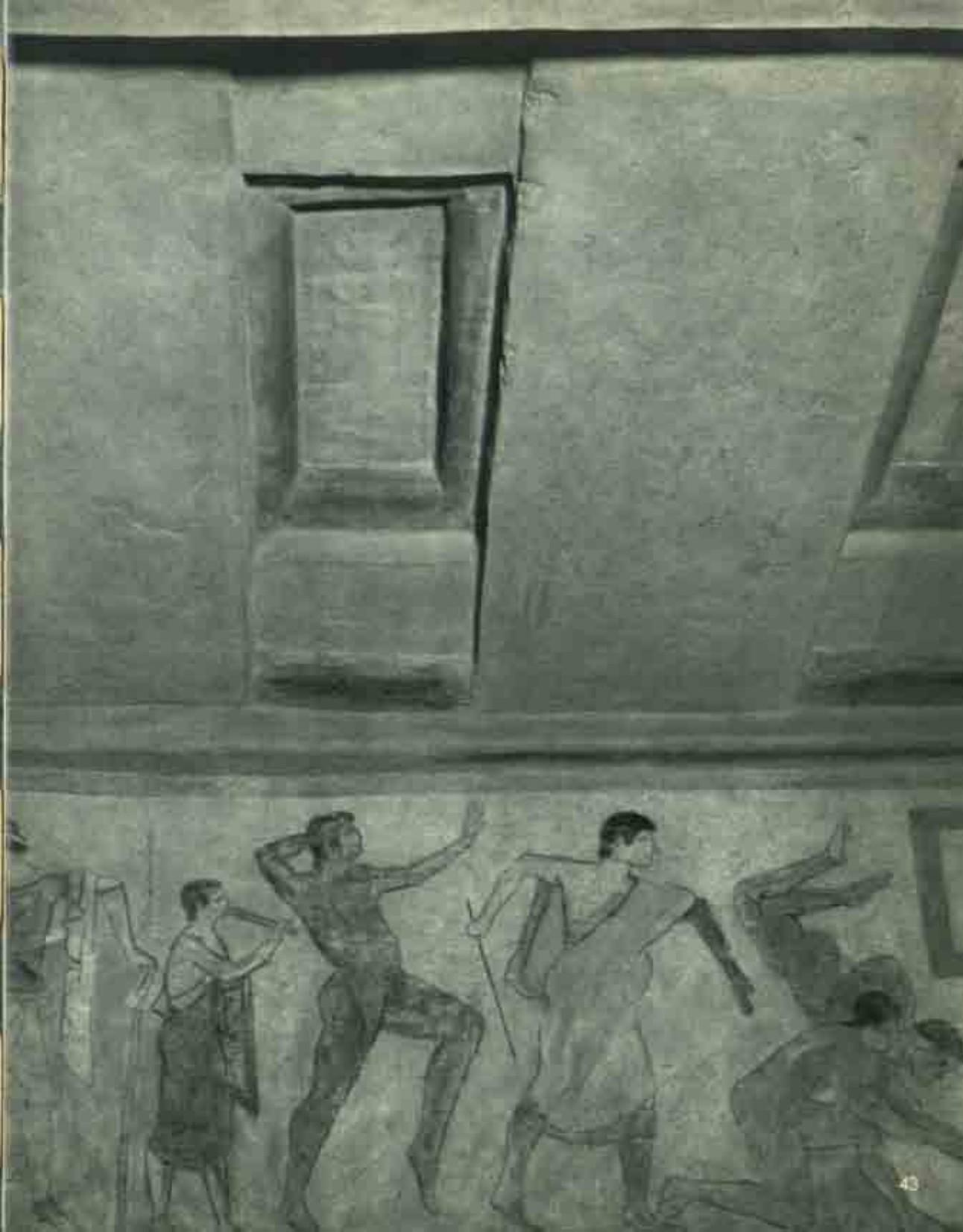
Among the most ancient traditions in peasant-lore is naturally the exorcism of danger to the harvest from bad weather; and here again there may be much that has survived from Etruscan times.

The Tyrrhenian ritual for exorcising lightning is known to have included the prescription that after lightning had struck a place, the *fulguriator* had to purify it, collect all traces of the flash and bury with them any person or object struck by it, uttering prayers in a low voice as he did so. The ceremony ended with a sacrifice; and the "lightning-grave," as it was called, then became a consecrated place. Originally no doubt the anger of the god of lightning was appeased with human sacrifices. In the known period of Tyrrhenian history an ass was offered to the god, and asses' skulls were set up to ward off lightning: a custom which still survives almost unaltered in the vicinity of the Sabine hills, where the peasants stick up asses' or sheep's skulls on saplings or vine-poles to protect their fields from lightning and hail. In the region round Monte Cimino there is a custom of "declamation on the lightning"; when a storm approaches, the women there call out magic phrases over the fields at the tops of their voices, and the popular belief is that the fields are safe so far as their voices reach. The content of the magic phrases seems to us simply meaningless: one of them, for instance, is all about cocks and knives. But it is possible that they are linked with some lost ritual prescribed by the Etruscan science of lightning.

41. Wine-jug, *bucchero* in relief (sixth century B.C.).
42. Entrance to the *Tomba Casuccini*, necropolis of Clusium.
43. The central chamber of the "Tomb of the Ape" (fifth century B.C.), necropolis of Clusium.









Magic is still used in many forms in these regions to cure illnesses and infirmities. The formulae are only one degree less primitive than those used in the time of the Tyrrhenian witch-doctors, from whose repertoire we know one phrase for the treatment of a sore foot. The patient had to chant it twenty-seven times in succession on an empty stomach, and then finally touch the earth and spit on it.

From Barbarano a steep track leads up into a concatenation of gorges which continually branch out in new directions. The luxuriance of life in their well-watered depths is as profuse as the plateaux above are parched and barren. The valleys are easily accessible in the spring, when their primitive wildness is mitigated by the delicate colours of young foliage and the primroses' splashes of gold, and even in the wider spots by the rich yellow-green of cultivated vegetable-plots. Untidy goatherds in trousers of shaggy skins, looking more like woodland fauns than human beings, are resting idly here and there in front of the entrances to the ruins of Etruscan tombs, which give them shelter in bad weather. In the higher and less accessible tombs, however, into which the corpses were probably lowered down vertical shafts from the edge of the ravine above, there are hawks and buzzards nesting, and their long-drawn-out, melancholy cries echo down from the cliff-face.

In the summer the approaches to the Tyrrhenian vaults are overgrown with impenetrable thickets. The whole bed of the valley becomes a tangle of tropically luxuriant growth. In the narrow parts of the ravines thick arches are formed by huge moss-grown beeches and other trees, their tops inextricably intertwined with ivy; and beneath, the wild brooks ripple down in miniature waterfalls, to form pools green as emeralds where fish dart to and fro like shadows. The impression of a mysterious twilight-land of the underworld is heightened by the immense lettuce-leaves and the dagger-shaped bracken which grow in thick bunches on and among the boulders, lacquer-green in colour. But high above the placid brooding of the wilderness in the valley-bed flames the broom, on spurs of rock bleached by the scorching sun from red-brown to the colour of rose-

wood, or even to the dull glow of gold, like the sacrificial fires of some pagan ritual.

The ancient pathways cut by the Tyrrhenians like tunnels out of the almost vertical sides of the rock still lead up the ravines from the bottom to the empty plateaux where their towns once stood. Almost the only surviving evidence of their existence in most cases is the necropolis with its tombs arranged in many tiers, adorned with monumental façades. On one of the abandoned sites near Barbarano, once occupied by the Tyrrhenians, there now stands under the rustling oak-trees the half-ruined little church of San Giuliano. Its massive Romanesque pillars of tufa-stone, with their capitals curled up like leaves on either side, could certainly have come from an Etruscan *hypogaeon*. There are many mediaeval sanctuaries on just such sites interwoven with dimly remembered legends—serving perhaps to exorcise the ghosts and demons that the imagination might picture roaming about the ruins of pagan cities. In many of the myths of these regions the Christian idea of redemption and expiation is repeatedly linked with Etruscan sites. San Vivenzio, the patron saint of Bieda, in particular plays an important role in these traditions. He is said to have killed a dragon which once had its lair in one of the Tyrrhenian tombs, known as the “dragon’s grotto,” and which claimed every year three maidens from the city as its victims. It is significant that this monster was located precisely in one of the spots dedicated to the Etruscan powers of the underworld. There may well be found at work here reminiscences of the Etruscans’ inferno, populated by dragons and other monstrous figures.

The most magnificent rock-necropolis of all in the neighbourhood of Monte Cimino is to be found about five miles from Vetralla (on the road to Viterbo), in an area of complete desolation. Here the Tyrrhenians made a remarkable architectural adaptation of a huge natural amphitheatre formed by the junction of two ravines. From its outer semi-circle, two-thirds of a mile in diameter, the ground falls in a series of terraces to the bottom. Into the wall at the back of the highest terrace are built the so-called “temple-tombs.” Standing

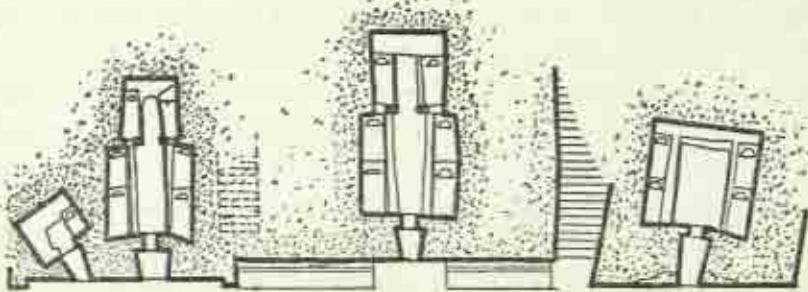
some fifteen to twenty feet high above the shafts in the rock, which run deep down into the mortuary chambers, they are like temple-façades carved entirely out of the natural rock, with long triangular gables and rows of columns in front, most of which however are now destroyed. These little temples mostly date from the fourth century and are carved out of the natural rock: the upper edges of their roof-tops with their ornamental indentation coincide exactly with the top of the cliff. Rain and sun, heat and cold have eaten away the soft tufa-stone for centuries; and the outlines of the reliefs which fill the pedimental spaces, once no doubt painted in brilliant colours, have now almost entirely disintegrated. Only faintly here and there can the figures of warriors or dancers be distinguished. Large parts of the porous rock have also broken away and fallen onto the lower terraces, which also show signs of tombs constructed out of the rock. In front of the entrance to one of these a fabulous monster, carved out of stone, still crouches on guard. There are no inscriptions here, though there are many such in other valleys of the dead. In the nearby necropolis of Castel' d'Asso, for instance, there are characters up to nearly a foot high incised in the façade of the rock-tombs.

Before time laid its finger on the shapes and contours of this city of the departed, it must have presented an overwhelming spectacle. The style of these sepulchral buildings, rising storey on storey above one another, seems in some extraordinary way to be almost a projection of the monumental quality of this lapidary landscape, opening up as it were to reveal the womb of the earth. A hill towering above the ravine carries the little church of San Vivenzio, who dwells here in a grotto-tomb above the abyss peopled by departed souls. Looking down from this spot, the view over the dark volcanic rock of the gigantic amphitheatre, the tiers of which were once occupied by the Tyrrhenian dead in their last gathering, has still a strange and sombre impressiveness about it.

The town of Orcia, which also built a similar necropolis for the departed, was by comparison remarkably small. Its ruins lie nearby on a little cliff-top. They date mainly from the Middle Ages: those

of Etruscan date consist only of the remains of a single street and two gateways. The modest circumference of the village, which survived until the ninth century A.D., can still easily be recognised from the ruins.

Archaeology has found most of the rock-tombs of this neighbourhood already robbed of their valuable funerary gifts. But many of them still housed heavy sarcophagi of stone or earthenware, which have now mostly been transferred to the Museum at Viterbo for safe keeping.



10. *Plans of rock-tombs at Orela*

Viterbo, once a powerful city of the papacy with numerous fine churches, monasteries and palaces, became an early centre of Etruscan studies. Learned monks undertook excavations as early as the fifteenth century. The monk Annio, for instance, who was a humanist and an enthusiastic archaeologist, left behind him a quantity of plans and drawings of Tyrrhenian mausoleums which can still be seen in the city museum today.

There is no necropolis round Viterbo that is as old in date as the cities of the dead in the coastal area. The sarcophagi recovered from them date from the fourth to second centuries B.C., and the figures outstretched on them show the same efforts to achieve a portraiture-likeness that are characteristic of Etruscan art in its later periods. In places so far removed as this from the great spiritual and economic

points of focus, it is natural that funerary sculpture never reaches the level of such works of art as are found in Caere, Tarquinia, Vulci or even Chiusi. The crudity of the figures is emphasised by the material, a tufa-stone of coarse-grained, porous texture known as *nenfro*; but in spite of this, as well as of their lack of technical finesse, there are a few works of great impressiveness to be found even here. There is a half-reclining Tyrrhenian figure whose downcast features bitterly express a feeling of resignation, and a painful experience of the transience of all things. The forehead, burdened with memories, and the proud line of the tight lips make it easy to forget the faults and carelessness of the carving, and to notice instead the vitality of its composition and the poise of the right hand as its long fingers draw up the drapery. Here again, in contrast to Greek idealisation of the beauty of the male body, the Etruscan artist's primary interest has been in the face as the mirror of its inner life.

The art of the sarcophagus was originally developed by the Etruscans from Phoenician, and later from Ionian models; but at a very early date it took its own path, which was eventually continued in the funerary sculpture of the Romans. Admittedly the decoration in relief of Roman sarcophagi was based on hellenistic originals, but the solemn, expressive marble portraits of their men and women at rest still preserve the memory of the Etruscan conception of the sarcophagus.

The sepulchres of the Middle Ages reintroduced the ancient custom of putting representative portraits of the dead on their coffins. It may well be the case that in some respects the Tyrrhenian tradition had a more powerful influence than Roman models, in the region that used once to be Etruria. The introspective, ascetic character of later Tyrrhenian art lay closer to the spiritual outlook of the Middle Ages than the elegant but reserved idiom of Roman hellenism. The spiritual affinity with the past survived longer and in a purer form in the provinces, away from the violent tides of fashion that dominated the great cosmopolitan cities. Moreover, the abandonment by Christian art of the earthly and corporeal, and its submersion in the things

of the other world, turning it more and more into a kind of mystical pictography, again approximates rather to the character of Etruscan art, which likewise found its material entirely in religion, even if of another kind. In the Gothic style, graphic art is in the last analysis only a means to an end; and the same is true, at least in the later period, of Etruscan funerary sculpture.

It has already been pointed out in the previous chapter that the Etruscan influence on the sculpture and painting of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in central and northern Italy is probably to be attributed less to the discoveries of Tyrrhenian works of art than to the persistence of the fructifying undercurrent of artistic tradition from the most ancient period of this region's culture. Looking at these sarcophagi, it may well be thought that they are a striking example of the direct influence of Tyrrhenian models. The formal similarities between works of the fourth century B.C. and those of the Gothic style or the Renaissance are often literally astounding. Even the monument of Ilaria del Carretto, Jacopo della Quercia's masterpiece at Lucca, with its melancholy charm and quiet linear harmony that no one who has seen it can ever forget, exhibits an extraordinary correspondence in composition, in posture, and in the treatment of the drapery, to a lovely female figure of the fourth century on a sarcophagus now to be found in London. On the latter, the dead woman lies outstretched with bacchic emblems round her and a young doe crouching on her knees; and even this detail is reproduced in a similar form on the monument of Ilaria del Carretto, who has a graceful gazelle lying at her feet to share her last sleep.

Inescapable, and still wonderfully alive, there is something of the soul of the vanished Tyrrhenian race to be seen to this day in the art, in the naïve popular customs, and even in the very landscape of ancient Etruria.

Chapter Eleven

LAKE BOLSENA

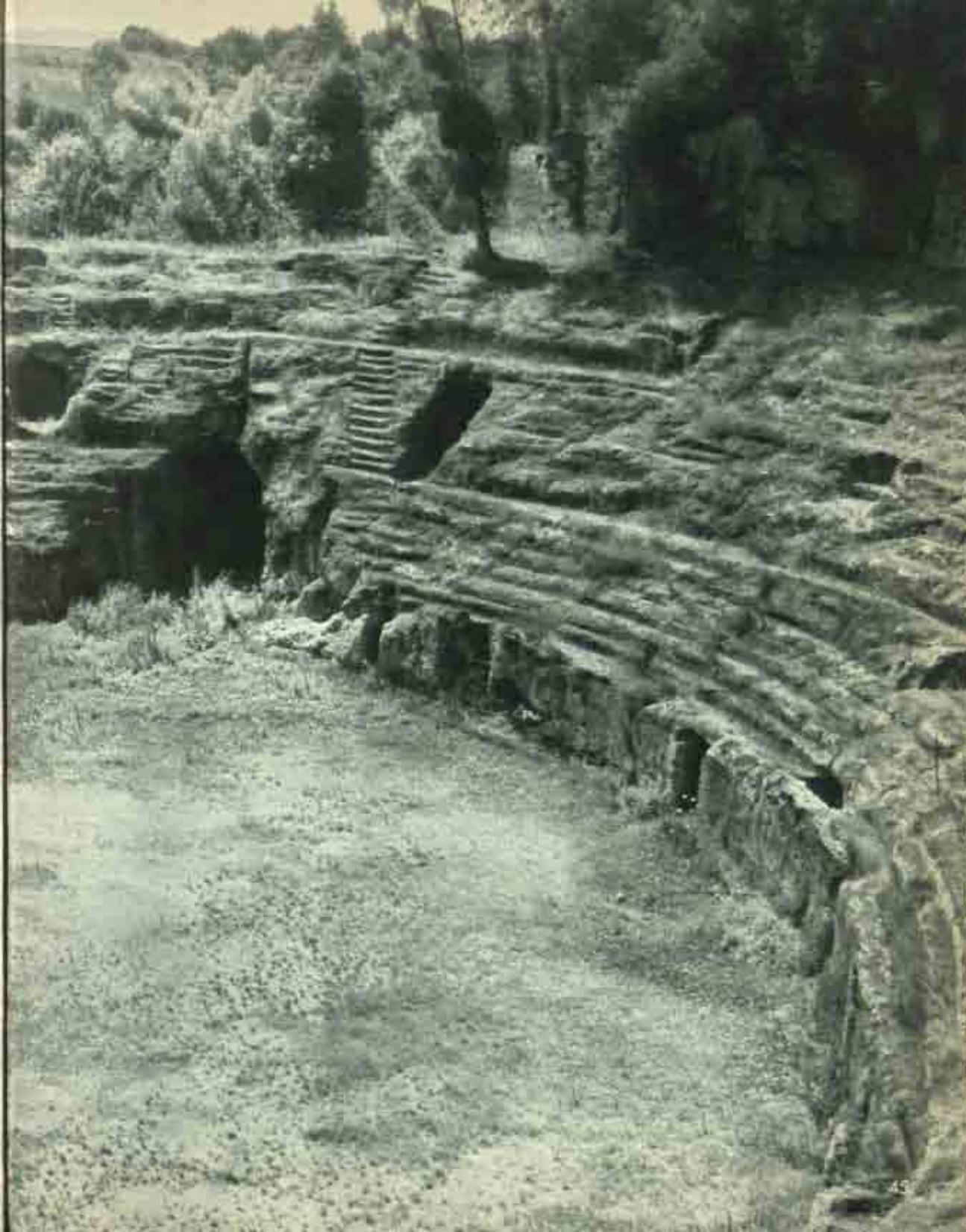
A GREAT stillness lies over Lake Bolsena. Its waters are dark like old silver, and dark too are the volcanic cliffs that surround it in a great ring. It is as gentle as a domesticated animal. Pale blue fishing-boats drift across its glossy surface to catch pike and fat black eels, which were regarded as delicacies both by the Etruscans and later by the Romans. Little villages cling like honeycombs to the hills round about, and the silky grey of olive-groves embroiders its shore. The quiet sadness of all places of great antiquity hangs over the landscape. Its features, furrowed with strife, have been overlaid by the centuries with a melancholy smile, the smooth mask of oblivion. Only a few gaily coloured thickets survive of the oak-forests whose mighty crowns once swayed in the storms above the bottomless waters lying in the crater of the lake; and long vanished are the fortified towns of the Etruscans which watched over this lake, the jewel of their homeland.

Nowhere else on Tyrrhenian territory did the earth drink deeper draughts of blood than did this hot, volcanic soil which once belonged to Velsuna (Volsinium) and shared the reflected glory of Voltumna's shrine. Whether the national sanctuary stood on the neighbouring height of Orvieto or, as many believe, on one of the hills surrounding the lake, in any case this was the place where for centuries the nation's pulse beat strongest. It was here that the Tyrrhenians met in assembly every year, when they still had a nation's destiny to take counsel on; it was here that the last act of the bloody tragedy of their downfall was finally played out. The spot is

full of memories of them. But these memories are not simply ghostly reminders of a lost greatness, as they are on the Etruscan coastland, which no new destiny has ever come to release from the spell of its past; they are rather the ingredients of a continuing evolution, still living and fruitful and not yet approaching its end. From the day when the Tyrrhenian peasant first cultivated the soil round Lake Bolsena, it has remained a land of splendid fertility that many have fought for, never again to be shut out from the course of history. After the battle-scarred centuries of the destruction of Etruscan power, there followed a long period of peace and prosperity for this land under Roman rule. But when the hour of destiny came for Rome to rear her towering edifice above the ruins of the Etruscan world, a fresh alarm of war was raised over the silent Tyrrhenian cities of the dead.

The day came when the army of the Goths encamped under the oak-trees of this lakeside; and a boat pulled across the silent water to one of the two islands that rise out of the waves, a jagged remnant of the volcanic crater, the colour of lava. In the boat was borne the destiny of the Gothic kingdom: the lovely queen Amalasuntha, daughter of the great Theodoric, who was to be drowned there by command of her co-regent Theodahat. So for the second time Lake Bolsena was the scene of an event of historical importance to the world, for with this murder began the disintegration of the Gothic kingdom. After the Goths it was the Lombards who occupied the region round the lake; and later still it became a bone of contention between quarrelsome nobles and ambitious popes. Some thousand years and more were to pass before it was to be allowed a period of undisturbed prosperity and fruitfulness again.

Down by the shore of the lake, guarded by a melancholy mediaeval ruin, lies the village of Bolsena, whose name recalls an echo of Velsuna. In its neighbourhood there are also the ruins of a Roman-Etruscan town—not those of the real Volsinium, but more probably remains of the settlement established by the survivors of Volsinium's catastrophe, at the behest of the victors. Mediaeval Bolsena ignored









these ruins, however, and settled round the church of St. Christina. According to the legend, St. Christina was a daughter of the Roman prefect of Volsinium in the third century A.D., who lived here, professed the Christian faith, and suffered martyrdom for her conversion. A portrait of her, resembling the figures on an Etruscan sarcophagus, made of painted earthenware by one of the della Robbias, lies in a cave which was perhaps at one time dedicated to Mithras. A heavy slab of lava bearing the imprint of a delicate foot, which is said to have been sunk in the lake with the body of the martyred girl, is displayed under a magnificent marble baldachin of the ninth century. The canopy, overlaid by age with a green patina, is decorated with ornamental reliefs which combine barbarity and delicacy in a strange medley, beasts and monsters from the ancient world of oriental legend being curiously intertwined with ornamental scroll-work derived from the north.

In this church, which was built to replace an older sanctuary in the eleventh century, legend records that a thousand years after the martyrdom of St. Christina there took place the miracle of the bleeding host. It was to celebrate this that Urban IV established the festival of the Holy Body of Christ and built the cathedral of Orvieto. In this mysterious way, after so great an interval of time, the destinies of the two sites on which old and new Volsinium had stood came together once more.

The people in the neighbourhood of Lake Bolsena live in a curious intimacy with things of the Etruscan past, which seem to be as much part of their soil as trees and hills and water. They find it quite natural that the peasant's plough frequently turns up pottery and bronze vessels and figures from the earth; that children go "hunting for gold" after heavy rainstorms, and in fact not infrequently find Etruscan jewellery and utensils washed out of the depths of the earth by the water; or that their homes are often next door to the tombs of their ancestors. To the peasants of this neighbourhood the tombs are known as "grottoes." Many of the villages take their names from

them, and the villagers feel no reluctance about drawing them into their lives as places to live in. The most remarkable example of this is the Grotto of San Stefano, a village which originally consisted almost entirely of Etruscan habitations of the dead, until the dead were displaced by the living. It is only within recent decades, when the area round Lake Bolsena has enjoyed some economic advancement, that the inhabitants of the Grotto of San Stefano have gradually abandoned their old homes—how old can in most cases only be guessed—and moved into little stone houses on the edge of the cliff where the Tyrthenians had once buried their dead. But those who were unable to profit from this social improvement stayed as before in the Grotto where their fathers lived; so that a part of the village is still to be found underground. The only architectural innovation introduced by the present-day inhabitants of the Etruscan rock-tombs are the chimneys, which stand out everywhere on the upper surface like little pillars with rounded tops, somewhat resembling the phallic symbols which the Tyrthenians set up in front of their tombs to show the numbers of the male dead. Wooden gates now close the entrances in place of the original heavy stone slabs and doors. Many of the peasants have enlarged their underground homes by adding a simple portico, but apart from this the ancient structure of the tombs is almost unaltered. There are just one or two beams fixed across individual rooms, from which to hang strings of dried tomatoes, like coral beads, or rough rings of garlic or golden corn-cobs. Most of these curious beneficiaries of the Etruscans' worship of the dead live in the large ante-room of the *bypogaeon*. In the niches which may once have served to house graceful vessels, black and coloured, and other votive gifts to the dead, there now stand simple articles of everyday use on fitted shelves. On the smoke-blackened walls of even the poorest homes there hang heavy copper cooking-pots, handed down from many generations past: they have no resemblance at all to the splendid workmanship of the Tyrthenians' bronze vessels, but there are still many reminiscences of remote antiquity in their shapes.

Immediately beyond the living-room (formerly the *atrium*) there

are generally narrow chambers in which the Etruscan couple were interred on their two stone couches. In these chambers, which are little more than alcoves, there still stand the beds of the peasant couple, little dreaming of their ghostly predecessors who lay here long ago. One of these cave-women has borne ten children in this abode of the departed!

Almost every one of these grave-dwellers has a story to tell that lies far outside the everyday experience of the new stone houses in the village above. The mother of the ten children found refuge here among the dead after her parents had driven her out of their house with the husband she had chosen, because he was poor. Her neighbour, on the other hand, was a bent old man who had climbed a step up the social ladder by marrying an even older, blear-eyed woman who enjoyed possession of a more spacious vault than himself, with a considerable store of produce, hams and casks of wine in the back room. This man was also the only one of these tomb-dwellers of the Grotto of San Stefano who found his home slightly uncanny; all the rest were quite unconscious of committing sacrilege. He had never yet ventured down as far as the lowest level of all; and there was a frightened look in his eye when he mentioned the existence of other "grottoes" going miles deep into the mountainside.

The cleanest and friendliest of all these underground dwellings belonged to an old man. When we caught sight of him, he was busy making neat little *gnocchi*, the Italian national dish, out of mashed potato flour. With his gaunt, sunken profile and the pointed nose under his weatherbeaten hat (which he wore in the house, as peasants do), he might have been one of the Etruscan dead from the *nenfro* tombs. He went on preparing the dish with a quiet smile, while we admired his simple home, the extreme cleanliness of which was evidence of a careful housewife. Later we learned from other people that the wife of this old man had gone mad and had borne him two imbecile sons, whom the father looked after by himself. When we learned these facts, the smiling contentment of the old man began to seem puzzling and even frightening to us, and the peaceful look in

his bright, deep-set eyes seemed to be that of a man who knew too much, who had been through so much pain that no further sorrow could touch him.

Not far from the Grotto of San Stefano, with its wonderful underground life, is Montefiascone, which stands out highest of all the villages round Lake Bolsena, with its cathedral dome rising above the landscape like a silver moon. As if storming the heights, the houses of this little town climb eagerly up the steep slope of a former volcano, extinct for thousands of years, the crater now filled up by the lake. On the outermost spur of the rock rise the ruins of Montefiascone's citadel, its tower proudly dominating the broad sweep of the dully gleaming water. The streets of the town are like narrow, overshadowed defiles. On Sunday they are so full of people on holiday—women in gaily coloured blouses and scarves, and men in black and children in their best clothes—that it seems almost impossible to get through. But in the middle of the close-packed houses, which take up every square inch of the limited space, there rises the towering cathedral like an overgrown plant. A square substructure supports a huge octagonal dome, under the cover of which the church consists only of a single hall. This church was erected by the sixteenth-century Veronese master, Sammicheli, in the same countryside where the first arch was once put up by Etruscan hands. It is a marvellous realisation of the old Italian style of circular, vaulted building that was to be of such significance for Europe and the world.

As one looks up at the dome of the cathedral, unfolding upwards as naturally as the calyx of a flower, memory goes back to the primitive vaulted tombs of the early Etruscan period, with their stepped projecting layers of hewn stone, which were not yet arches in the true sense, but were nevertheless a first faltering step in that development which gave rise to all the arches and vaults that were one day to be built in Europe.

As the carriers of the Cretan-Mycenaean cultural tradition, the Tyrrhenians probably brought with them to Italy the technique of

the Mycenaean "beehive" (*tholos*) tombs, which were large, round, underground chambers roofed with domes formed of concentric courses of stone. The circle, being a geometrical expression of infinity, was a symbol well suited to the Etruscan character with its chthonian inclinations. It is therefore no accident that it was they who made the circular building their peculiar form of self-expression, in contrast to the Greek style, which evolved the horizontal architrave. It seems to be in the neighbourhood of Volsinium in particular that the technique of constructing vaults was perfected; for the oldest true vaults, dating from the fifth century B.C., are to be found over the tombs of the necropolis of Orvieto. The Romans inherited the Tyrrhenian taste for circular buildings in their cult of the dead, and exaggerated the forms they took over from the Etruscans to a grandiosely monumental scale. The gigantic mausoleums of the Roman Caesars are thus descended from the mound of earth built up on a circular stone base, which the Etruscans used to contain the habitations of their dead. They still retained the ancient form of the hemisphere on a square or cylindrical base, only the proportions being changed. The low, crudely cut stone tambour of the Tyrrhenians' sepulchral mounds was extended to form a high-walled perimeter with an ornamental surface of marble; and the mound planted with cypresses on top became relatively smaller. In the Pantheon at Rome, with its Greek gabled portico and the mighty circumference of its central structure, combining Etruscan, Italian and Greek elements in that harmonious and majestic synthesis which is Roman art, the mound becomes simply a shallow dome. Later the Romans adopted the circular form for their secular buildings, especially for baths. From these baths and mausoleums, which were erected in all the larger towns of the Roman Empire, the Orient later derived its mosques; and early Christianity often converted them into Christian houses of God.

The most vigorous revival of the old, sacred use of the circular building, however, took place at the Renaissance, when the mysterious fertility of Etruscan soil was renewed to produce men of

creative genius in unexampled profusion. At Florence the domed vault was given a new impetus and vitality in the masterpieces of Brunelleschi. And Michelangelo, whose *Creation and Fall* in the Sistine Chapel has the quality of universal tragedy, penetrated by the divine, demonic glow of pagan conceptions from the ancient world, was the designer of the last and highest consummation of the primordial, tellurian style of circular building in the dome of St. Peter's. More than two thousand years lie between its breath-taking perfection and the crude joints of the sepulchral vaults of the Etruscan princes; yet the same influences were at work in it—the eternal, insatiable longing to comprehend the incomprehensible, to fix the infinite in finite form.

It may have been a mere coincidence that Sammicheli gave the cathedral of Montefiascone the form of a mausoleum—a form so intimately linked with the sepulchral monuments of the Etruscans. But it could also be regarded as a deliberate devotion to the *genius loci* on the part of the artist, who long lived and worked in this region; for nowhere else in the world is that spirit so powerful a force as here in Etruria.

Beneath the city walls of Montefiascone there stands another house of God, nestling in a fold of the mountain-side. This is the Basilica of San Flaviano, a contrast in every respect to the cathedral with its circular dome above. One glitters like a star hovering over the landscape; the other is a stunted, deformed, battered outcrop of the earth, to which it closely clings. Yet even the latter resembles a sepulchre; and it is as if everything ever created here were bound by the spell of that mighty cult of the dead that once stamped its imprint on the features of the land.

The Basilica of San Flaviano consists of two churches: a lower one of the eleventh century, which was extended two hundred years later, and an upper one, which consists of a gallery built over the central part, running all the way round but considerably wider at the front and back. This construction gives the lower church something of the character of a crypt. Its central aisle is open to the upper church

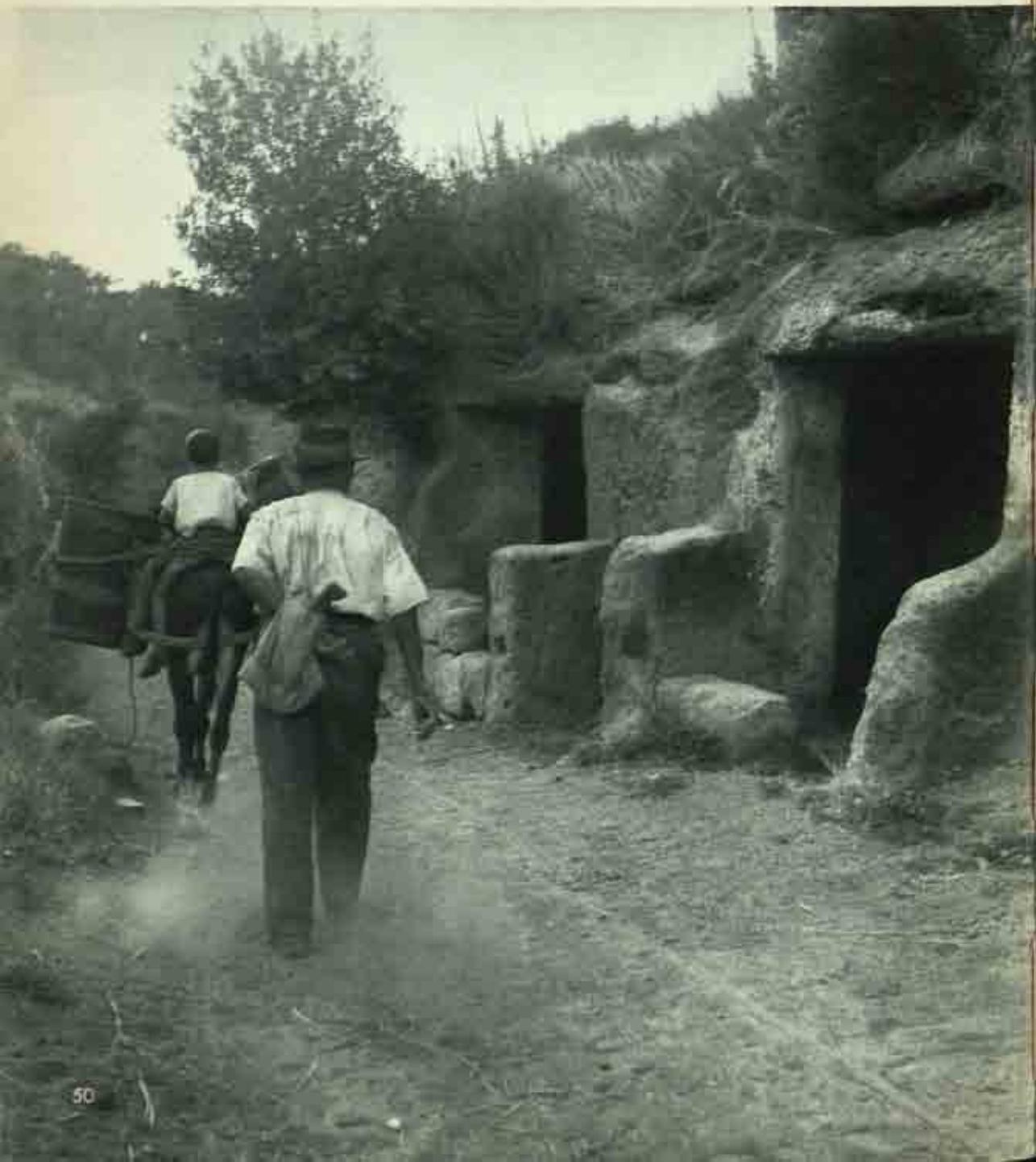
as far as the presbytery; its windows glazed with onyx let in an amber light. The aisles on either side and the triple apse, however, fade and merge into the twilight beneath the low vaults which are supported on sturdy, squat columns and pillars. It is a building whose ponderous architecture seems charged with the burden of the earth, with the obscure mysteries that echo the superstitions of a long-lost past. We meet this same solemn, melancholy welcome only in the great pillared halls of the Etruscan sepulchres. The triple apses are the first of their kind in church architecture of the Middle Ages, recalling the tripartite *cella* of Tyrrhenian temples. Intruding between them are curiously sinuous, worm-like piers, carved out of the granulated stone of the walls. On the capitals squat eagles with lions' heads, leaning forward as if on watch. Some of the piers seem as if they had been burst open by force to allow a hidden column to emerge from within; and out of their broad, sharply articulated trunks grows a wild profusion of unruly tendrils: a jungle inhabited by legendary beasts—ponies with snakes' tails, and lions with bearded human heads, and long-beaked birds, and a host of creatures sprung from the dark night of lost demonic cults. Every capital is a separate inventive creation, overflowing with a separate life. It is almost as if the sap were still rising and falling in the stone trunks of the piers and columns, like aged trees, to nourish the luxuriant tendrils and the great pulpy leaves. The imagination of the unknown artist has combined in these capitals of San Flaviano the magnificent proliferation of botanical *motifs* of late antiquity with the austere lines of Lombard wattle-patterns; the whole perhaps fertilised by the mysterious inspiration of these subterranean vaults, with the squat pillars and columns of brown tufa-stone in their shadows, like strange growths out of the prehistoric past.

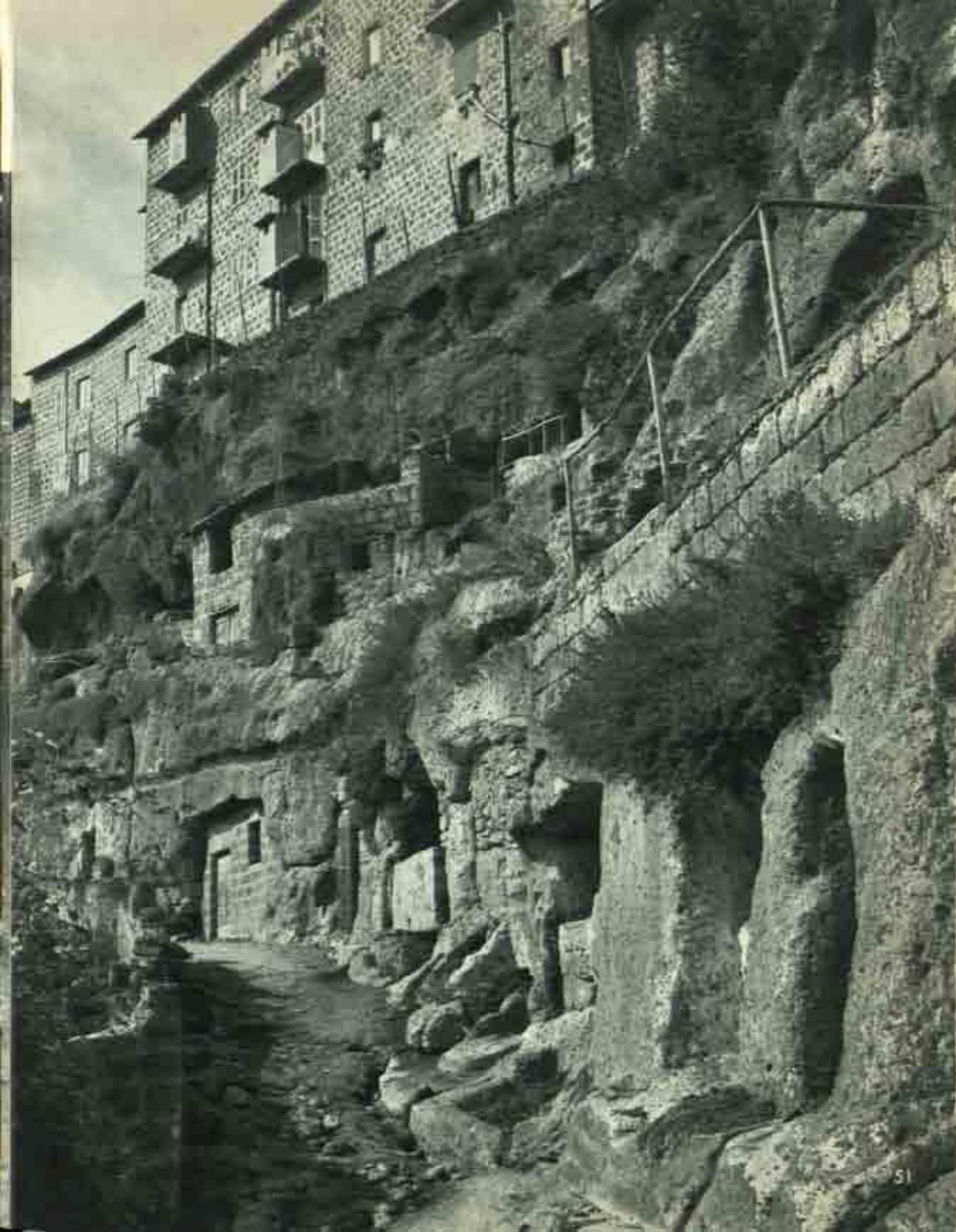
Such was the enchanted labyrinth of the past from which the mediaeval carvers of San Flaviano derived the form and character of their work, to mould them with their hands into the formal patterns of a new age. In many of the Romanesque churches within the range of Tyrrhenian culture it is impossible to avoid the feeling that

their builders were profoundly affected by the magic of surrounding memories. It is often noticeable, too, that their artistic sensibility (as well as the archaic massiveness and austerity of the Romanesque style) has more in common with the directness of Etruscan art, rooted as it so entirely was in religion, than with the sophisticated splendour of Roman antiquity, even though they were certainly surrounded by examples of the latter in far greater quantity.

In a side-chapel of the Basilica there are still to be found some fragments of carved stone which came to light during the work of restoration. These may well derive from an even older sanctuary. Among them is a small, flat-headed lion of Asiatic appearance—a mediaeval descendant of those Etruscan lions which guarded sarcophagi or the entrances to tombs. The ancestors of both these and the Tyrrhenian lions used once to stand as sentries in front of the royal palaces of Babylon, before they began their travels across Asia Minor and the Aegean to Italy with the Etruscans. Even then they were regarded as protectors against the forces of evil. Later, in Etruria, the figures of lions became primarily a funerary symbol, with the function of guarding the habitations of the dead from evil spirits and demons; but at the same time they also stood for a symbolic representation of death itself. Mediaeval mysticism took over the lion as one of its most important allegorical figures: it now guarded the portals of churches as well as sepulchral monuments, and admitted the most various interpretations. In the cult of the dead, for instance, the lion became a symbol of the Resurrection. In other contexts, again, it was equally a symbol of the good and of the bad: of Christ and the Devil. Its usage in illustration of the Gospels, or as a heraldic beast, or as a foot-rest for episcopal figures in mediaeval art, goes back in each case to the original Asiatic style, with its animal reliefs and its lions supporting columns. The similarity between Etruscan and mediaeval lions is often astounding. It goes right down to individual details of workmanship in treating the manes, the nostrils and the jaws of the animal, which show clearly that the model was not the naturalistic Roman lion of marble—the *objet d'art* of the Hellenistic









period—but the sacred, primitive beast of prehistoric legend. Even the snub-faced lion of San Flaviano, with its protruding tongue, has its precursors in early Etruscan art.

Besides the torso of the lion, there is also a fragment of a relief among the finds in the side-chapel. At first sight it appears to be of Etruscan origin: it represents a female demon with two tails, like Scylla, of a kind not infrequently to be seen on cinerary urns and reliefs in Tyrrhenian tombs. But on closer examination one can see that this figure of the underworld has undergone a spiritual transformation in the light of Christianity; and it is plain that it is a mediaeval work. This Scylla is no longer the terrifyingly majestic creature of the depths, which often has wings and carries a sword in Etruscan representations, but a hideous creature like a witch with hanging breasts and straggling hair. Yet still it comes to the same thing, for in the Middle Ages the ancient gods and demons of the pagan world were still regarded as real, though now to be identified with the powers of evil and darkness. The theocracy that had been overcome by the Cross turned into a world of ghosts and unclean spirits, trying to attain their revenge from the darkness to which they were banished and only to be held in check by the sacred sign of Christianity.

Thus thousands of years of destiny are reflected in the shapes and figures assembled in the golden twilight of the Basilica of San Flaviano. Curiously enough, there lies buried here in the shadows of the alien past a German bishop, one of the family of Fugger, as can be read in the inscription on the tomb, worn with age though it is. He found his doom in the magic of this volcanic soil, from whose bosom sprang a sweet and fiery wine. More to be prized than prayer and incense he found the intoxication yielded by the golden liquor of the vines of Montefiascone; and so he abandoned his company (being in Italy in the suite of a German king) and here drank himself to death. To the present day, in memory of this ecclesiastical German tippler, the wine of the neighbourhood is known as "Est! Est! Est!" because the bishop's practice was to send his servant in advance to

test the wine, and to write in chalk on the wall of any tavern where it was worth drinking, the word *Est!* (*Here it is!*) In Montefiascone, however, the servant found a wine whose excellence could only be adequately testified by a triple repetition of the magic word. And in fact his master was never to find his way home again from the tavern.

Thus old, ivy-crowned Bacchus or Fufluns, to whom the Etruscans used to sacrifice so cheerfully at their festivals thousands of years ago, once more proved himself stronger than the God of the Christians on this never completely de-paganised soil.

Chapter Twelve

CHRISTIANITY AND ETRUSCAN BELIEFS IN THE OTHER WORLD

IT is by no means so incredible as it may perhaps appear at first sight that the Etruscans' underworld and their notions of demons should have survived in Christian beliefs about hell, such as are illustrated by the ecclesiastical art of central and northern Italy. However complete the historical downfall of the Etruscans may have been, their religious traditions none the less survived long afterwards among the people. Practices out of the "Etruscan Discipline" outlived even the pre-Christian period of Rome's history and seriously impeded the conversion of the masses to Christianity. Even Theodosius found himself constrained to threaten with death at the stake anyone who consulted a *haruspex*; but later he again permitted public sacrifices in the temples, at which the attendance of *haruspices* must have been required. Of Constantine the Great we know that he inquired from the *haruspices* what propitiary rites were necessary in the event of the royal palace being struck by lightning. How seriously Etruscan doctrine was taken even in the sixth century A.D. is plain from the fact that, when Alaric was threatening the Eternal City, a *haruspex* made an offer to the Pope to avert the danger by invoking lightning from heaven. Up to the seventh century, when it was finally forbidden by a solemn decree, the "Etruscan Discipline" was still generally known, although Honorius and Stilicho had ordered the books of the nymph Vecui along with the Sibylline books to be burned. It is therefore no matter for surprise that the vocabulary of symbolism common among the mystics of the Middle Ages should still have

employed numerous images and figures from the other world of Rome and Etruria. Virgil, who came from Mantua, may well have had Tyrrhenian blood in his veins, and certainly descended from a family circle in which the Etruscan tradition was still alive; and in the sixth book of the Aeneid he depicts the world below with a conviction and a vivid exactitude of detail which show that for him Hades was a far more concrete conception than it ever was for the Greeks. The Christian notion of heaven and hell was surely more decisively influenced by this climate of ideas than by the meagre hints in the Bible about the world beyond. The poems of Dante and the representations of the torments of hell and of the last judgment, which originated approximately in the tenth century (for instance, in the Campo Santo at Pisa), may be regarded as constituting the renaissance of the Etruscan underworld.

It was among the Tuscan people, too, that the dread of hell and its terrors found expression more powerfully than anywhere else in the Middle Ages. And it was from the Etruscan demons, of which many masks have been found, with their hooked noses and boar's fangs, that the principal figure in these macabre visions, the Devil himself, borrowed his physical shape when he first made his appearance in painting and sculpture in the tenth century.

Romanesque art is everywhere filled with the traditional symbols of ancient cults, especially those inherited by the Etruscans from oriental originals and adapted to a Christian significance. There is practically nothing in this respect that Romanesque art introduced instead of finding it already there. Just as the *Scylla*, the lion and the rest of the legendary beasts of the Tyrrhenians (the snakes and gryphons and dolphins and winged horses and dragons) still survive in the religious art of the Middle Ages, so too even the *Chimaera* is to be found in the mosaic floor of Aosta cathedral and on the pulpit of San Ambrogio at Milan. There is a close similarity, too, between a hemispherical mediaeval font from Atri, near Rome, with four fabulous animals resembling lions peering over its rim, and the bronze cauldrons of the orientalising period in Etruria.

The mystical language of mediaeval symbolism is today only partially intelligible to us. We have no longer, after all, any key to the confusion of weird and monstrous creatures which enlivens the capitals, the cornices, the pulpits and doors of their churches; or to the hidden laws governing their botanical ornamentation; or to the magic numbers embodied in the architectural forms and dimensions of their Basilicas; or to this entire world of emotional superstition, with its complicated roots in age-old ritual conceptions.

In Tuscania, a formerly Etruscan town situated half-way between Tarquinia and Viterbo, there are two churches which show with exceptional clarity in their decoration how pagan, and especially Tyrrhenian, traditions have survived in these regions.

Tuscania is a town surrounded by walls crowned with battlements and numerous towers; it is an authentic Etruscan foundation on a hill of tufa in the middle of a broad and rocky valley. The vertical cliffs of the ravine shelter it so effectively that it only becomes visible when one is almost standing at its gates. After the Etruscan and later the Roman domination, there followed a period of decline; but then Tuscania revived again between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries. Its defensive fortifications and a number of exceptionally fine churches were erected in this period. In the course of the fifteenth century, however, Tuscania was twice pillaged and burned; and from these disasters it never recovered again.

Heavy mediaeval gateways still lead into the centre from each side. The town is uniformly built of brown tufa-stone; but in its present form it is considerably smaller than in Tyrrhenian times. On one of the walls surrounding the main square, the moss-grown, weather-beaten figures of dead Etruscans still maintain their curious watch from the lids of stone sarcophagi. A coiled dragon is the heraldic sign of Tuscania; and he too may well be a fabulous creature from the ancient past, perhaps copied from the *pystrix*, a winged monster, half dragon and half fish, that stands threateningly confronting the dead as they ride to the underworld on Etruscan reliefs. The same

figure of a dragon is found again in other parts of Etruria; for instance, in a religious representation at Potigliano.

The two Basilicas of Tuscania that have already been mentioned stand outside the town on one of the hills facing it, in the slopes of which the Tyrrhenians probably once buried their dead. It is true that neither of these two churches is built above a tomb, as is the little chapel of the Madonna dell' Olivo, not far from Tuscania, beneath which lies a spacious vault supported by pillars and containing a labyrinth. But the Basilica of San Pietro was built over the remains of a Roman temple, which had itself probably taken the place of an Etruscan sanctuary. This church, which was begun in the ninth century, has long since been by-passed by the flow of daily life: no longer do the faithful betake themselves to it on Sundays; its doors are closed to prayer, and its bells are silent. Today it is no more than a lonely monument to a distant and scarcely comprehended past.

The façade of the church looks over an extensive square, overgrown with thick grass. It is enclosed on the right by the ruins of the former episcopal palace with its lovely windows, and on the left by two high towers circled by jackdaws with their metallic sheen. The church is built of the same tufa blocks as the rest of Tuscania, worn jagged and porous by the passage of time. But against this foundation of peasant simplicity the gleaming white marble ornamentation of the façade stands out in rich brilliance. Above the doorway, flanked by slender columns, and an ornamental *loggia*, the marble splendour of the round central window unfolds its delicate, diversified craftsmanship, with the four beasts of the Evangelists round it and two small apertures opening to the sides, each surrounded with reliefs.

The form taken by Romanesque churches derives much less from architectural theory than from ritual mysticism; and this is what gives them their peculiar formal character, which is to be found again in this particular shrine. It finds expression, among other examples, in the obvious defects of internal harmony between the decorative elements in the façade. Round the left-hand window are arranged

the busts of angels and saints, crowned by a representation of the Lamb of God and wreathed in swelling foliage of the ancient style. Beneath this celestial assemblage, however, a carved slab is let into the wall which must undoubtedly have come from an Etruscan tomb or temple, showing a Tyrrhenian ritual dancer with his arms lifted in a solemn gesture. It may well be that the earth yielded him up in the course of the excavations of the foundation for this house of God; and that the pagan carving was then built into the consecrated wall to avert the harmful influence of magic. (Plate 53.)

The counterpart to the Tyrrhenian figure on the right-hand half of the façade is the Devil himself: a curious devil, bearing clearly the marks of a chthonian deity descended from remote antiquity. His bearded face has three profiles, like that of Geryon in the "Tomb of the Underworld"; and, like the demons of the Etruscan inferno, he carries a snake against his breast—the sign of the powers of the depths. Above the monster's triple forehead, the hair is bunched in little tongues of flame.

Here is a survival of a deity-figure over a thousand years old, probably derived ultimately from Central Asia, and equally at home in Babylonia and Asia Minor. The triple-browed god also appears in Europe from an early date. He was worshipped by the Celts, and known to the Tyrrhenians in his chthonian guise, as is apparent from the "Tomb of the Underworld." Dante, too, depicts the "lord of the realm of pain" as a gigantic figure with a triple face:

I saw three faces on his head:
One was in front, and this was of ruddy hue;
The other two were both conjoined to this,
And above the middle of each shoulder
They met upon the ridge thereof.

There are other places besides Tuscania where Satan is represented as *vultus trifrons*: for instance, on a relief in the Roman Basilica of St. Paul Beyond the Walls; in the paintings of Campo Santo at Pisa; even in the work of Fra Angelico. By a remarkable inversion

(which is nevertheless by no means rare in the religions of other races), even the Trinity came to be represented in the later Middle Ages as a *vultus trifrons*. The church authorities repeatedly raised their protest against it, pointing to the explicitly demonic character of the three-faced deity. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Pope Urban VIII finally forbade this kind of representation of the Trinity, which was particularly widespread in the south Tyrol. Yet even so it was by no means uprooted. In the neighbourhood of Brixen the peasants to this day still venerate the deity with the triple brow, ascribing to him exceptional powers of magic. The Curia at Brixen has only recently ordered the surrender of all cult-objects of this kind.

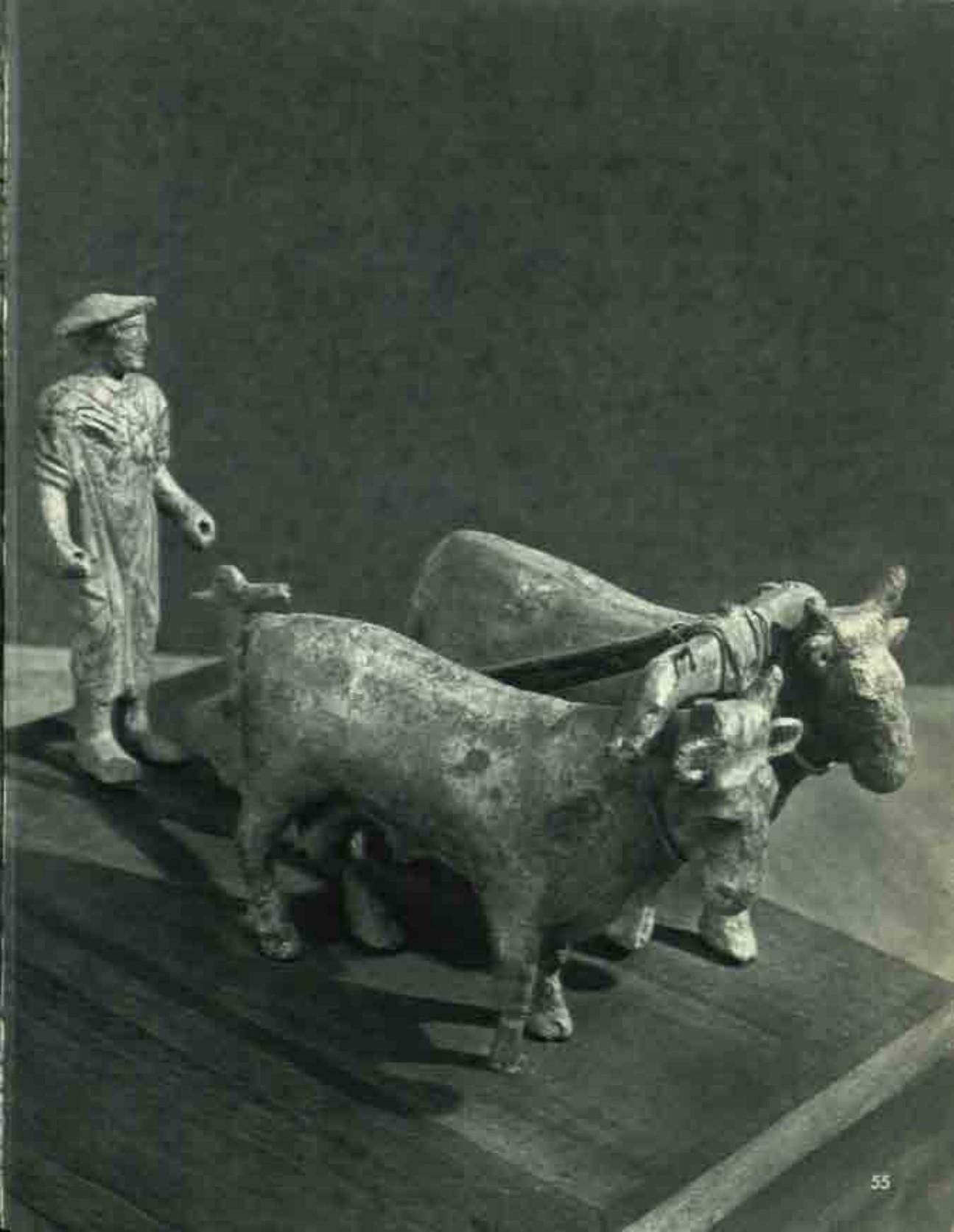
Out of the jaws of the *vultus trifrons* of Tuscania there grows a curious, rank, proliferating rambler with monstrous flowers, entwining little demons with human heads and the bodies of birds; and these wear pointed head-dresses reminiscent of the Phrygian cap—a symbol of the underworld, hence also known as "hell-caps." The coils go round the window up to a second triple-browed demon's head, which rests on the upper edge of the aperture (*bifora*). The head of this Satan wears a crown of pointed leaves, like the three-faced Tibetan god Sang-dui. On either side of the lower demon-figure stand poppy-buds, another legacy of the symbolism of the pagan kingdom of the dead.

The interior of the Basilica of San Pietro, whose façade so mysteriously bridges the gap of thousands of years, is of bold and massive proportions. The apse is decorated with an Ascension of Christ in the severe Byzantine style, but enlivened with a pleasing sense of vertical movement. In the side-aisles, separated from the central aisle by low-pillared arches, there are tombstones let into the floor, the figures outstretched on them worn flat by the tread of many generations. The oldest part of the church is the presbytery, where the marble choir-stalls are of an antique style and their backs are formed of snake-like creatures from the underworld. Pigeons nest in the rafters of the abandoned Basilica, filling its silence with the melodious sound of their cooing.

53. Bas-relief of Etruscan origin on the front of the church of San Pietro at Tuscania, near Viterbo.
54. Small bronze statuette.
55. The ploughman of Aterzo.
56. Gorgon's head: a terracotta antefix from the temple of Apollo at Veii (fifth century B.C.).
57. Bronze cinerary mask.





















The crypt of San Pietro is like a shadowy grove. The ceiling is supported by numerous slender pillars, some of them derived from the Roman temple whose foundations are still partially visible down below here; and it is divided into a series of little groined vaults.

The Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, sister-shrine to that of San Pietro, is a little lower down on the same hill. Its façade has three richly decorated doors, an ornamental *loggia*, and a large and rather clumsy rose-window above the main entrance. The effect is rather dwarfed and overshadowed by comparison with the exceptional length of the building as a whole. The interior of the church contains numerous frescoes, still in fairly good condition; a pulpit covered with beautiful tracery in marble; and pillars decorated with austere figures of saints. There is still a colourful liveliness about the whole which is lacking in the upper church, where pedantic restoration-work has left a rather empty after-effect. Here too there are many different Etruscan reminiscences in the decoration of the Basilica. The mediaeval *Scylla* of San Flaviano recurs as a cornice-moulding, along with other demonic characters. On the rear wall of the central aisle is one of the most gruesome representations of the Last Judgment to be found on Etruscan soil, where such scenes are certainly not in short supply. The jaws of hell are here literally conceived as a dragon's mouth armed with fearsome teeth. Enthroned above sits the Prince of Hell with snakes winding round him, swallowing the bodies of the damned. Round him in a ghastly dance swirls the throng of lamenting souls, swept towards him as if by an irresistible whirlwind.

Here is a resurrection of the horrors of the Tyrrhenian Hades in even cruder form. The melancholy death-lust of the Etruscans has been exaggerated into the sadistic passion of Christian asceticism, with its hatred for everything sensual or savouring of the earth. What the two Basilicas of Tuscania reveal, then, is not only the continuing force of inherited ideas, but the deep significance of their spiritual transfiguration through Christianity.

58. Reverse of a bronze mirror, Cephalus carried off by Eos (the dawn).
59. Engraved reverse of a bronze mirror: Atalanta and Meleager (fourth century B.C.).
60. *Kiste* of the fifth century B.C. from the neighbourhood of Palestrina.
61. Two warriors carrying a dead man: bronze handle of a *kiste* from Palestrina.
62. Theseus fighting the Minotaur: bronze handle of a *kiste*.

Chapter Thirteen

THE TYRRHENIAN ART OF LIVING

So strong was the attraction of the Etruscan necropolis, with its relatively accessible treasures and the wonders of its subterranean world, that the tombs were always the first things to be excavated in Etruria. The spade almost entirely neglected the places where the Tyrrhenians had once lived their lives; for although their excavations produced useful material for scholarship, the yield of intrinsically valuable finds was much more meagre.

Consequently most of what has survived of the Tyrrhenian cities still lies underground today. In many cases a Roman stratum overlays the remains of the Etruscan period. The religious sanctuaries must also inevitably have disappeared almost without a trace, since up to the very end of the Tyrrhenian nation's existence they were generally made of wood and painted terracotta. Consequently, apart from the necropolis, only the fragments of a cyclopean wall reveal here and there today the site of a vanished town.

One of the cluster of wealthy Etruscan settlements round Lake Bolsena is Ferentum. Its ruins are among the few remains of Roman-Etruscan towns that have been scientifically investigated. The excavations carried out here belonged principally to the Roman period, but the earlier Etruscan features of the town showed through so clearly and vividly that under close examination the Roman phase of Ferentum tended to recede into the background.

Ferentum stands on an undulating, terraced plateau between two ravines, in the middle of a hilly landscape almost devoid of trees: a typically Etruscan topography. On the horizon, far away across the

delicate landscape, Montefiascone shimmers in a pale blue light, like a reflection of the lake from the dome of its cathedral. Here the tufa-stone has the brilliant colour of copper. The bare outcrop of the rock shows through the shrubbery, the outline of which is closely followed round the summit by the old wall, now almost entirely destroyed. A mass of bare and weathered ruins of a Roman wall shows the site of the dead city from a distance. In the centre of it gleams the deep red-brown of a massive structure of squared tufa-blocks: this is the ancient theatre of Ferentum, whose fabric and construction have successfully outlived the splendour of Rome's marble architecture. It is not large, but it has a remarkable compactness of form and a ponderous elegance of somewhat rustic character which fit well into the landscape. Seven doorways of huge stone blocks, with musical instruments depicted on them in relief, lead to the auditorium and the stage, which is almost completely preserved. The circular forms so much favoured by the Tyrrhenians predominate in this case not only in the usual semi-circular shape of the theatre's plan, but also in the massive arches surrounding the orchestra and in an attractive series of linked arches of stone, fitted without mortar, which surround the highest tier of seats at the top of the amphitheatre.

Such is this rural temple of the muses, substituting its own gay and lively contours and the intimacy of its atmosphere for the marble elegance of Greek architecture; and here the inhabitants of Ferentum used to enjoy the mimic performances which once, no doubt, had a purely ritual character, but later presumably became less refined and more profane. Livy and Plutarch both attest the fact that the Romans borrowed the art of pantomime from Etruria. In 363 B.C., on the occasion of a festival of the gods, the first recorded performance on a stage, presumably religious in character, was put on at Rome; and Tyrrhenian actors were brought there for the occasion. It is possible, certainly, that miming dancers are meant rather than actors in the strict sense of the word. The ancient records state explicitly that the pantomime dance was brought to Rome by an Etruscan *bister*, but it is not clear whether *bister* is the Etruscan term for a dancer, which

would at the same time cover an actor; or whether, as Plutarch states, Hister was the name of the first Tyrrhenian mime by whom the art of acting was first introduced at Rome. In any case the Latin term *bistrio*, for an actor, comes from this word. In earliest times the Etruscan *bister* would come on with a mask to improvise a dance and a scene, carried out in gesture with a musical accompaniment. Gradually the spoken word was introduced in the form of a dialogue, which was also improvised. The art of the playwright, after the Greek model, seems to have arisen relatively late in Etruria. A certain Volnius is mentioned by Varro as an Etruscan tragic poet.

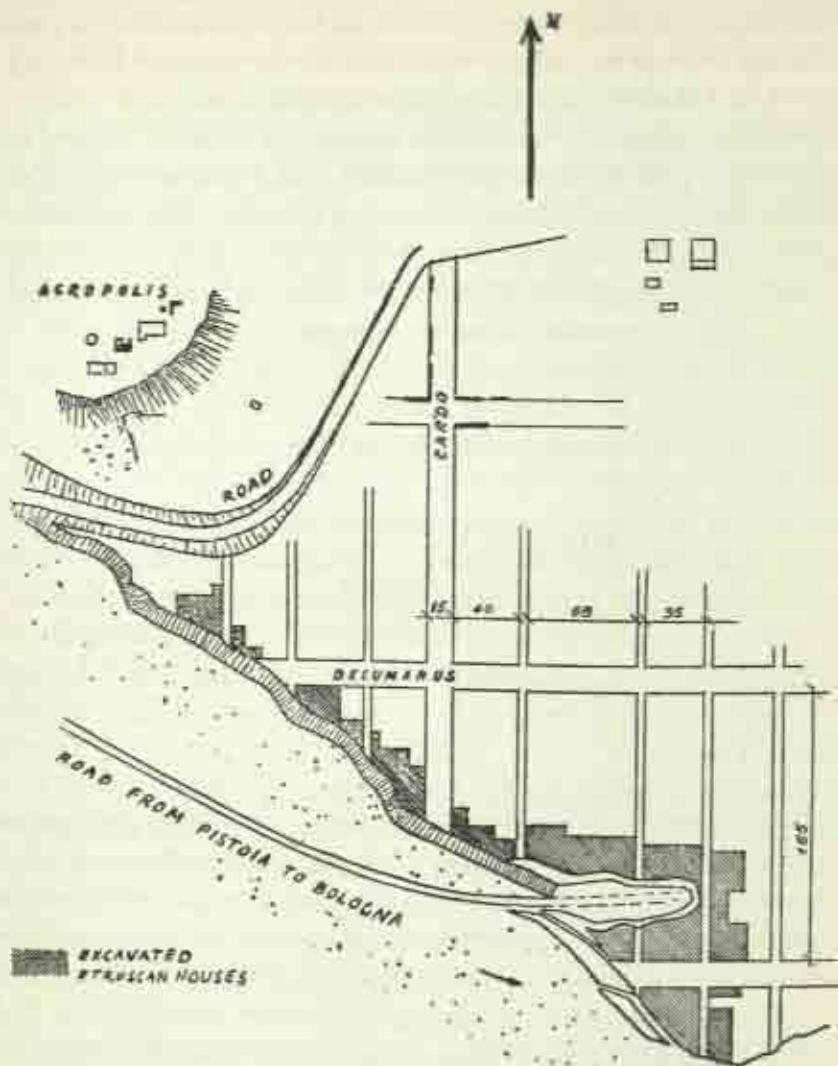
Neither in this field nor in that of literature, however, do the Tyrrhenians seem to have produced anything significant. They were not a poetically inclined people, in spite of their exceptional artistic talent. Like the Romans later, however, they showed a marked interest in writing chronicles, which Roman authors refer to as *Tuscae historiae*; and their aptitude for precise legal phraseology makes their religious literature in many respects the forerunner of the law-books of Rome. Naturally, like most other peoples, the Etruscans had their own religious lyric art. We know of choruses of young girls reciting hymns on ritual occasions; and possibly there were also heroic songs, accompanied by dances in armour. In the Faliscan area there were also erotic songs in use at weddings. All this lyric poetry has vanished, and we are therefore not in a position to know whether Etruscan prosody was based on accent or quantity. It can be assumed, however, that it was related to the Saturnian metre of the Latins.

The theatre of Ferentum has retained something like a living personality in the midst of the shapeless Roman ruins of the defunct city. The ancient soul of the place still dwells in the unbroken mass of its walls and the sturdy curves of its arches, which enlace it round like a garland. And even if today the paved highways of Ferentum seem to begin out of nothing and lead to nowhere, yet there is still a magical reflection of the life that once filled them to be seen radiating from these stones and ruins, thousands of years old, with the scraggy sheep-goats and the black cows browsing among them.

An Etruscan town was no fortuitous, unplanned collocation of human habitations: it was an organism growing out of a divine order; a tiny cell of the universe, solemnly bound to membership of it. This fact was given striking expression in the ritual of founding a city. The following account is taken from Cato and Varro.

On a day marked by favourable omens, the founder, clothed in a toga, would start by harnessing a white bull and a white cow to a plough, the bull on the right, the cow on the left. (The ploughshare must be of copper—an indication of the great antiquity of the custom, possibly going back into the Copper Age.) He then ploughed a furrow along the edge of a square, keeping the cow on the inside and holding the ploughshare fixed so that the ploughed-up earth was all thrown inwards. This heap of earth represented the future city-wall; the furrow represented the moat. At the places intended for gateways, the plough was lifted out of the ground: for these were profane, whereas the wall was sacred, as also was the space bounded by the furrow (the "sanctuary of the city"). It has already been mentioned that the *mundus* had to be situated in the centre, to serve as a means of communicating with the underworld; and also that the city was only legally founded when three temples, gates and streets had been dedicated to the sacred trinity, Tinia, Uni and Menrva. On the other hand, the shrines of Venus, Vulcan and Mars had to be outside the city, in order to keep at a distance lust, fire and strife.

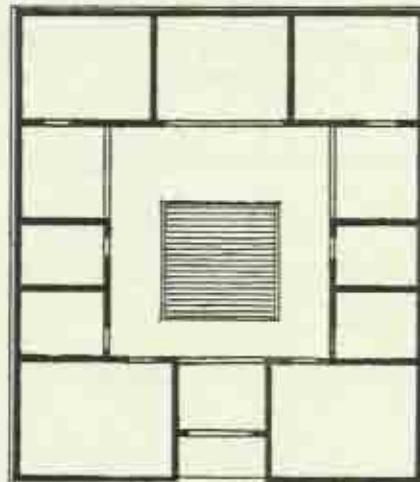
It has already been shown how the Etruscans used to lay out their town-plans on a strictly geometrical pattern, except in cases where this was prevented by the previous existence of Italian settlements or by the nature of the terrain. There is only one purely Etruscan settlement that has so far been systematically excavated: this is Marzabotto, near Bologna, founded about the end of the sixth century B.C. This site was destroyed by the Gauls at an early date, and consequently retained unobliterated its original division into eight parts. The town is divided down the middle by a perfectly straight main street from north to south, which is intersected by three streets from east to west. The breadth of the main street is striking: its carriageway is



II. Plan of Marzabotto

sixteen feet wide, and the footpath on each side is the same. Apart from the main routes, there is also a series of side-streets running parallel.

The Tyrrhenians had already begun to build rectangular stone houses by the sixth century B.C. Marzobotto had regular blocks of houses like a modern town; and the size of the houses was equally surprising. The living-rooms were ranged in the pattern of a horse-shoe round a central hall, the *atrium*, with an *impluvium* in the middle. Above this the roof was open, so that the rain-water could run down its sloping surface into the basin underneath it. Next to the *atrium* was



12. Plan of an Etruscan house

a domestic office (*tablinum*), with a fireplace and a stand for water. The gabled roof was supported on columns. In southern Etruria there was also commonly a roof-veranda. The typical *atrium*-house of the Etruscans, in the clearly defined form which it had already reached by the sixth century B.C., is the ancestor of the Roman house. Its ground-plan is substantially identical with that of the much later houses of Pompeii. The very term used by the Romans, *atrium Tuscanicum*, reveals the Tyrrhenian origin of this style of architecture. The word *atrium* undoubtedly derives from the Etruscan language.

It is to be found also in some place-names, such as Velathri (modern Velletri, near Rome), and Hatria, a Tyrrhenian colony at the mouth of the Po which has probably given its name to the Adriatic. No doubt it signified "court-yard," and perhaps "harbour" too.

While the simpler Etruscan houses frequently had outside staircases, as has been said, the better ones were often built with *loggias*, and occasionally also with pillared halls and colonnades round them.



13. *Cinerary urn in the shape of a house (Clusium)*

Diodorus states that these were a Tyrrhenian innovation to accommodate the crowd of waiting "clients." Cinerary urns in the shape of houses have survived to show us the most diverse varieties of Etruscan homes, ranging from primitive round or rectangular huts to the splendid baronial hall with a monumental gateway and graceful decorated pillars of carefully cut stone, often ornamentally arranged. Tuscan architecture of today still shows the characteristic details of this last type; and Etruscan styles are often to be found sur-

63. Incense-burner supported by a young man on a chariot: bronze (sixth century B.C.).

64. Dancing girl: the centre piece of a bronze candelabrum.

65. Gold breastplate from Vulci.









viving in astonishing ways, especially in palaces of the Florentine Renaissance (for example, in the Palazzo Strozzi). This shows yet again how deeply rooted are the traditions of the earliest period of Italian architecture. Romanesque architecture in areas which were once under Etruscan cultural influence, with its ornamental *loggias* round the apses or adjoining towers and façades, represents a continuation of the Tyrrhenian style which can be studied today not only in models of houses but in one of the two Etruscan gateways of Perugia, the Porta Marzia. Tuscan country-houses today still generally have the same type of roof that is characteristic of the Tyrrhenian house, sloping steeply and sharply projecting. Finally the Tuscan column, which was used particularly to decorate temples and which alone in all antiquity is fit to be set beside the perfection of Greek forms, enjoyed its own glorious revival at the Renaissance and in the Baroque. The most beautiful square in the world, the *piazza* of St. Peter's at Rome, is itself enclosed by Tuscan columns. Bernini chose for his colonnades not the Greek but the Tuscan column, because the admirable simplicity and strength of its native lines seemed to him best suited to his purpose.

We can thus form a clear picture of the appearance and layout of the Etruscan home; but the structure of the Etruscan temple is obscure and controversial, since we have only the foundations of the walls to go by, together with the terracottas that decorated them and one or two primitive clay models surviving in the form of votive gifts.

There are, however, clear descriptions of the ceremonial used by the Tyrrhenians at the foundation of their sanctuaries. First the *augur* with his crook would define the boundaries of the foundation (*templum*) on which the sanctuary was to be built. Then he would ask the gods for their consent. When this had been communicated by a sign—lightning, the flight of birds, etc.—the site then became known as *fanum*. On this *fanum* either an altar or a temple was then erected. Finally the *augur* took up his position in the centre of the site, facing south, and divided it into four parts, corresponding to the

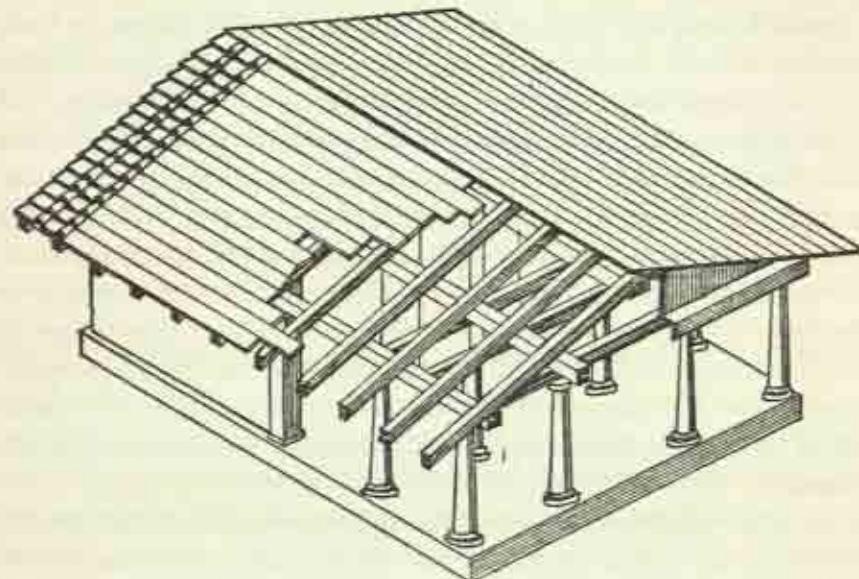
quarters of the sky. Later on pictures of the gods were set up in the northern quarter, facing south. When the building began, animals were sacrificed and their intestines were immured in the foundations. The foundation-stone was laid over them.

In the sixth century B.C., the temple of three cells, which is typical of Etruscan worship, became common all over Etruria. Foundations of this style have been found in Veii, Marzabotto, Orvieto and Fiesole. Towards the end of the sixth century Rome also had its two temples built by Tyrrhenian architects, dedicated to the divine trinities of the worlds above and below respectively. These shrines have a strong resemblance superficially to the Greek temples of the Geometric period, which were also made of wood and terracotta. Presumably the Tyrrhenians learned to work in earthenware from Greek masters; and this is even confirmed by Roman traditions. But whereas the Greeks soon began to make their temples of stone, the Etruscans remained faithful to the older medium. Plastic art in earthenware remained of incomparable importance to them right up to the date when their cultural individuality was finally extinguished.

Vitruvius, a Roman architect of the time of Augustus, has left a description of a Tyrrhenian temple, the appearance and proportions of which he was able to study in the Roman sanctuary dedicated to the trinity of the underworld, Ceres, Libero and Libera. This shrine was reconstructed under Augustus in the same form in which it had originally been built by Aulus Postumius in the year 494 B.C. There are many obscurities in Vitruvius's account, but it gives a general picture of an edifice of pronounced breadth and of compact and massive appearance. The sides of the quadrilateral stone base of an Etruscan temple were in the proportion of 6 : 5. The rear half of the available ground was taken up by the *cella*, to contain the images of the gods: this had three chambers, and was generally walled with bricks. In front of it stood an open, pillared hall, the height of the wooden pillars being equal to one-third of the breadth of the temple. The whole structure was covered by a huge, projecting gabled roof.

The interior of the *cella* was no doubt embellished with wall-

paintings. Tyrrhenian sanctuaries were distinguished by a highly coloured lavishness which must have given a rather barbaric effect. The pediments were decorated with statues of earthenware or gilded bronzes; the edges of the roof had terracotta rims with sharply pointed indentations and alternating patterns of lotus and palm motifs. Along the sides, in the archaic period, ran friezes in relief, showing fabulous animals of the orientalising style or processions of horsemen, warriors in battle or mythological scenes. The numerous antefixes were particularly characteristic: facing-bricks, large or small, with stylised heads of Silenus, Maenads, Medusa, male and female deities, *genii*,



14. Etruscan temple, after Vitruvius

demons and so on. Sometimes these facing-bricks represented complete figures, or even pairs of dancing figures such as Silenus and the Maenads. This world of mythology, garishly depicted in red, blue, white, black and reddish violet, thronged the edge of the roof, the façade and sides of the temple in a wild orgy of line and colour that must have been weird and grotesque rather than beautiful:

staring eyes, grinning features, violently agitated limbs. Such a Dionysiac hurly-burly, which has no visible connexion with the deities worshipped in the temples, and which is occasionally slightly obscene, may possibly have served the purpose of protective magic; or again, perhaps, it may be due to nothing more than the ancient Tyrrhenians' naïve imagination and insatiable appetite for decoration. In the fourth century B.C., under Greek influence, the ornamentation of the Etruscan temple developed more elegance of style. The taste for horror and the grotesque receded; the features of the demons sometimes displayed a sinister beauty; the female *genii* had a less hostile look. The pediment was no longer filled with heads or isolated figures, but with complete scenes in relief: fragments have been excavated which show a masterly execution. Botanical decoration became more delicate, and at the same time more luxuriant and organically natural. A greater refinement of form in every field came with the later period. The roof projected less: the columns became more slender; following Greek examples from the east, capitals in the form of leaves were introduced, but with heads protruding from them. Probably there were still circular temples even in the final period of Etruscan architecture. The latest temple decorations of terracotta in the Tyrrhenian style were found at Rome during building operations, on the *Via Gregoriana* and the *Via Appia Nova*. With the downfall of the Tyrrhenians, this style of decoration in terracotta fell into disuse.

Evidence of the splendour of the equipment of Etruscan temples can be found in the masterly round bronze lamp, from the second half of the fifth century B.C., which was dug up at Cortona and is now preserved in the museum there. It measures 23 inches in diameter, and it had sixteen little wicks fed by oil. The underside is beautifully worked in a design like a huge imaginary flower, from the centre of which glares a Gorgon, surrounded by archaic motifs in concentric circles. The cavities of the separate wicks are decorated alternately with the figures of a Silenus playing music and a harpy. (D'Annunzio has celebrated this lamp in his *Laudi*.) It is un-

doubtedly one of the finest examples of ancient craftsmanship in bronze.

The layout of the Tyrrhenian city—its splendidly equipped sanctuaries, its spacious, comfortable houses, with their hygienic system of piped water, its streets paved with huge stone slabs—all this is evidence not only of the high level of the Etruscans' urban culture, but also of the orderly arrangement of their public and private lives. On the latter subject especially a great deal of highly spiced gossip was spread by writers of the late Greek period such as Theopompus and Timaeus; and to this is mainly due the Etruscans' proverbial reputation for profligacy. It has already been pointed out that the Romans of the early period, living the austere lives of peasants, must have found the Tyrrhenians' more cultured way of life, with its intellectual and artistic pleasures, as distressing to them as a thorn in the flesh; and to Roman ideas, it was the same with the unheard-of emancipation of the Etruscan woman. But even the excesses which had once been imputed to the Etruscans were surpassed a hundred times over by the Romans themselves in the days of the Caesars.

The only entirely credible evidence of the Etruscans' way of life that has come down to us is preserved in their works of art, their religious beliefs and their legislation. For instance, their worship of their dead ancestors indicates a highly regulated family-system and moral code.

All the public and private affairs of Tyrrhenian life were alike marked by the same characteristic feature, that of having their roots in religion; and this led naturally to the imposition of exceptionally severe punishments on all transgressions of the law, since every crime was at the same time an offence against the gods. This comes out particularly clearly in the disproportionately heavy penalties for infractions of boundaries, which were punished by the banishment not only of the offender but even of his descendants. The regulations for surveying and distributing land, as has been mentioned elsewhere, formed part of the religious lore recorded in the ritual books. Legend had it that the nymph Vecui Arnth Ultimne, who lived at Clusium,

was the source not only of the science of divination from lightning but also of the regulations laid down by the greatest of the gods, Tinia, relating to the demarcation of boundaries; and she threatened the vengeance of the gods if these rules were not followed. Offences against property were also severely punished. The punishment of parricide was of a primitive gruesomeness which is otherwise to be found only in the ritual of sacrifice. The criminal found guilty of such a crime was put into a sack with a mad dog, a viper and an ape, and thrown into the water. Another hideous punishment is mentioned in the *Aeneid*, where the condemned man is bound face to face with a corpse, and left to die a ghastly, lingering death. Ordinary murderers were transported; homosexuals were thrown into the sea in a chest. The king held a solemn court of law every nine days. Minor offences were there punished by public flogging. Such strict administration of justice is unmistakable evidence for the nature of the Etruscan people's moral code.

To the Greeks, however, the Etruscan woman's equality of status was itself tantamount to immorality. For the Greeks permitted only to courtesans the freedom which the Etruscan woman enjoyed—not only to attend festivals with her husband, but also to share responsibility for the management of the household, business and landed property; besides learning to discipline her body in gymnastic exercises and to sit at her husband's side at sports run by naked athletes. The Greeks had already long outgrown the ancient Mediterranean world dominated by earth-goddesses and mother-goddesses, where the woman occupied first place as the bearer of children, the carrier of life. Homeric religion had displaced the "Great Mother" and set up in her place Athena, the maiden goddess not of woman born: the divine power of the spirit in the place of the primeval force of nature. But over the Tyrrhenian woman there still lay a last glimmer of that past glory which had surrounded the woman of Crete, who has come down to us in Cretan works of art richly garbed as a priestess or splendidly arrayed as a princess, or as a huntress or even as a fearless partner on equal terms in the bull-ring. In representa-

tions of Etruscan womanhood we see expressed a proud and highly vital self-consciousness, whether it is a bejewelled matron resting on her sarcophagus, or a girl letting herself go in a Dionysiac dance, or in the solemn movements of a sacred ritual, or on a flower-strewn couch at a banquet. Her importance in the family hierarchy is made explicit in the mention of the mother's family tree next to that of the father in funerary inscriptions. There are even cases where only the former is given, just as the maternal descent plays the principal role in Etruscan myths. Nevertheless, it would be a misconception to speak of a matriarchal system among the Tyrrhenians: at least there is no sign of this in the historical period.

The beauty of Etruscan women was greatly admired by the Greeks, though always with an undertone of moral disapproval. Tyrrhenian art has again and again captured the noble charm of its womenfolk in wall-paintings and sculpture. At the time of the Etruscans' ascendancy these portraits depict a powerful and spirited beauty; later the features of Tyrrhenian women become more refined and spiritual, with the aristocratic, slightly tired charm of high breeding and ancient lineage. A girl's head with a garland of flowers, which is to be found in the Gregorian Museum of the Vatican, has a delicate, dreamy expression, leaving only the full, firm lines of the chin to conserve something of the vitality of the past.

Even in the earliest pictures we meet the Etruscan woman already beautifully dressed, with her hair exquisitely arranged. In the archaic period women's clothes were long and close-fitting, with a belt at the waist and a shawl on top, almost reaching down to the knees and often arranged in folds. The hair was generally plaited in tresses, two of which hung down beside the face, while the main mass of hair was done up at the back. One of the earliest female statues, dating from the turn of the seventh to the sixth century B.C., has a hair-style remarkably reminiscent of that of German women in mediaeval portraiture, with its stiff plaits falling over the breast and its broad fringe on the forehead. (Plate 40.) The *tutulus*, a round or pointed coif covering the back of the head, seems to have been worn

by Etruscan women from the earliest times, until it was replaced in the fourth century by the Greek fashion. The *tutulus* is strongly reminiscent of a kind of head-dress worn by the Hittites, just as the pointed shoes worn by men in the archaic period have their forerunners among the Hittites too.

Tyrrhenian men used to wear short jerkins, or more particularly the *tebenna*, a predecessor of the Roman *toga*, which was thrown gracefully over one shoulder with either a linen undergarment or nothing at all beneath it. We have already described the splendid mantles worn by both men and women, with their rich drapery and precious ornaments—gold buttons, borders and tassels—and the coloured embroidery and texture of the loose-fitting underclothes worn by the women as early as the sixth century B.C.

The Tyrrhenian woman knew how to look after her charms and to give them an attractive setting. The multiplicity of her articles of toilet is a charming proof of the care she devoted to her face and body. The little flasks of ivory or alabaster or gold-inlaid glass to contain her cosmetics, the various instruments to do her finger-nails, to put on rouge or to take it off, the scented oils and so on—all these add up to a well-assorted apparatus of beauty treatment. But the cultivated tastes of the Etruscan woman were not confined to her own person: she liked to have beautiful and tasteful objects round about her too. It is no accident that the most exquisite minor works of Etruscan art were made for the use of women: above all, the round hand-mirrors of polished bronze, the backs of which were engraved or modelled in relief. Even the Greeks recognised Etruscan mastery in this sphere. Especially wonderful is the refinement and gracefulness of design shown by the engraved mirrors depicting mythological scenes or banquets or religious ceremonies in a border of ornamental motifs, the production of which began in the latter part of the sixth century and reached its most considerable scale about the third century B.C. The centre of this style seems to have been particularly round Palestrina and Vulci. (Plates 58 and 59.)

As containers for their jewellery and toilet-sets, Etruscan women

67. Sarcophagus, probably from a cinerary urn.

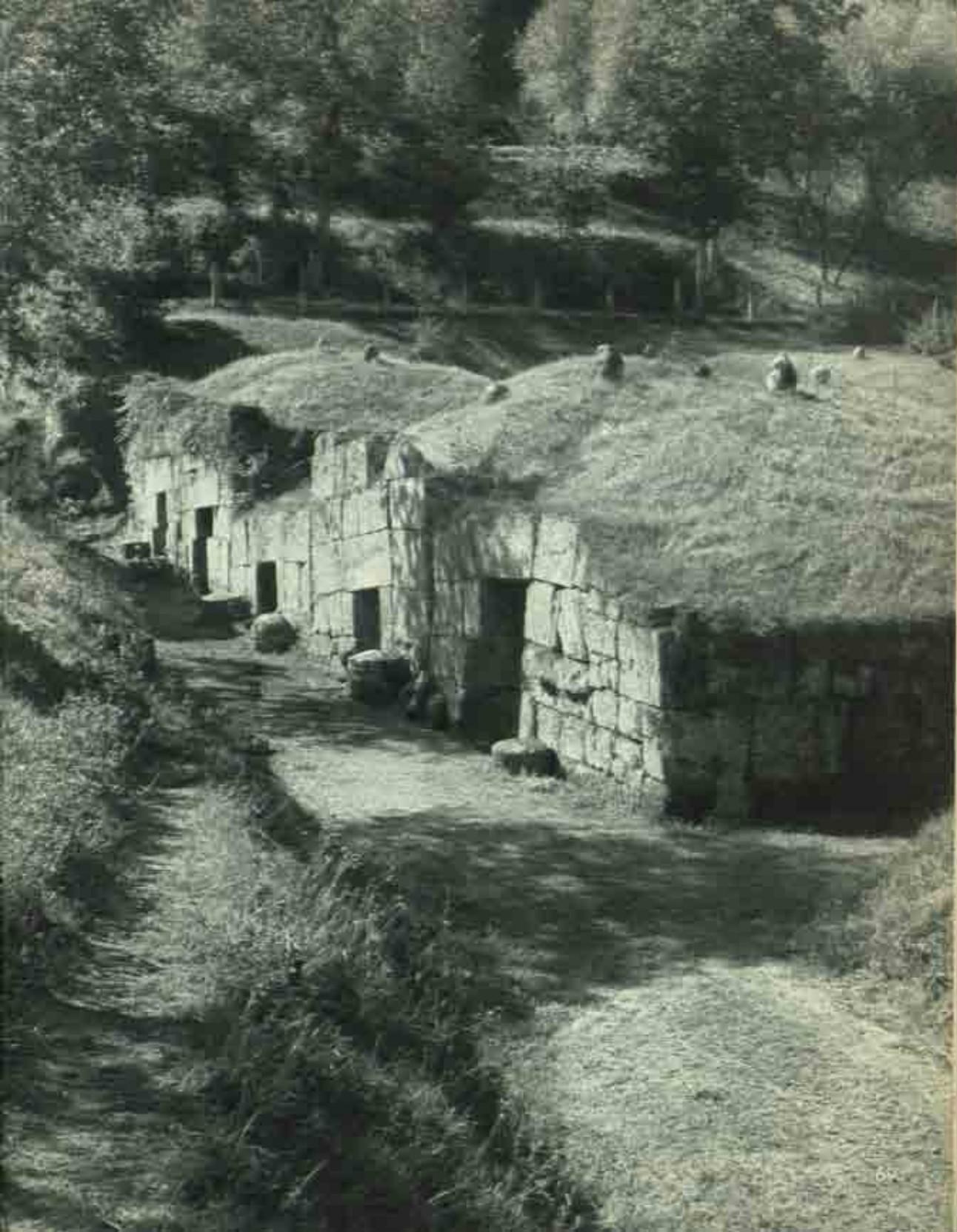
68. Inscription at the entrance to the necropolis of Orvieto.

69. View of the necropolis of Orvieto.

70. A warrior in action: acroterium in clay with remains of coloured paint, from the temple of Mercury at Civita-castellana (Falerii Veteres) (beginning of the fifth century B.C.).





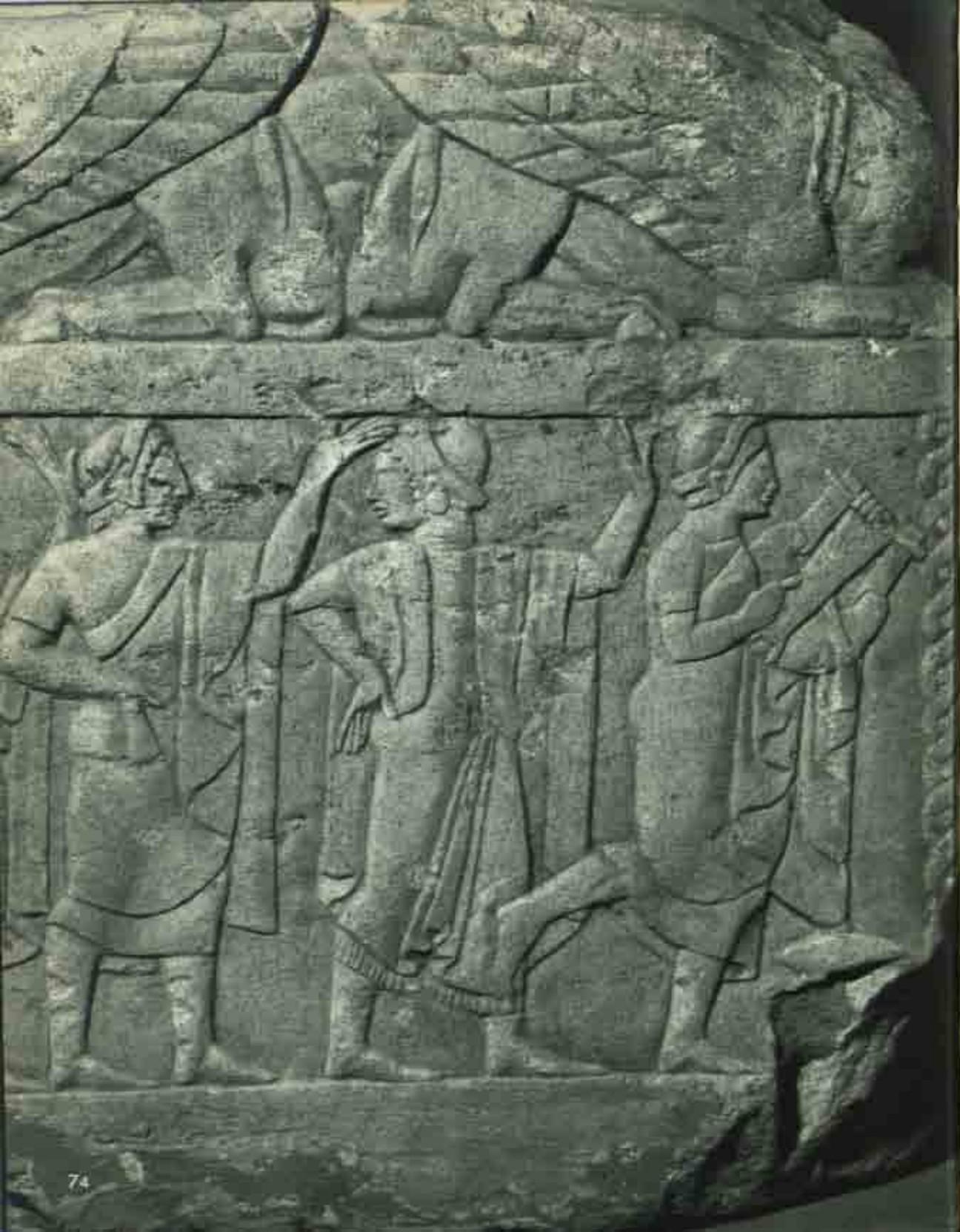












of the upper class had bronze caskets, cylindrical or elliptical in shape, like the *kistai* which the Greeks used for ritual purposes. These caskets were also decorated with pictorial engravings, and had charming ornamental figures on their lids. There are, for instance, handles in the form of sea-horses, or of two wrestlers interlocked, or of winged *genii*. In the Etruscan Museum of the Vatican there is a wonderful *kiste* with a representation of a battle of the Amazons; and above this bloodthirsty scene of wild confusion, in deliberate contrast, there is a pair of graceful boys floating past as if in a dream on a pair of swans, the tail-feathers of which make the handles of the casket. It was not for nothing that the Athenian Critias, at the end of the fifth century B.C., so highly esteemed all the bronze-work that was used to decorate Etruscan houses, whatever its purpose, as the best of its kind then made.

Another part of the domestic equipment of the Etruscans were the great bronze tripods which were already being produced with such superb craftsmanship at Vulci about the middle of the sixth century; and also particularly the endless varieties of gleaming candelabras in all sizes, the upper part sometimes spreading out like a flower, formed of naked figures in striking acrobatic poses. In this case the Etruscan love of the human form in motion has created works of enchanting vitality. (Plates 30 and 64.) But this beauty is not confined to valuable utensils of bronze, silver and gold for the decoration of the house—the ornamental plates and lamps and beaker-jugs and globular mixing-jars and chased bowls and salvers: even articles of everyday use were made with such feeling for style and craftsmanship that they can often be regarded as works of art. Even so simple an object as a kitchen-sieve was transformed by an Etruscan craftsman into a little masterpiece, with its handle extending into a little stylised horse's head and its perforations plotted in the design of a Gorgon.

The third chapter has already dealt with the goldsmith's work of the orientalising period. Later Etruscan ornamental work still remained extraordinarily fine, though the technique of granulations and filigree

71. Decoration in relief on a cinerary urn.
72. Head of Jupiter from the Temple of Mater Matuta at Conca (Satricum); terracotta (beginning of the fifth century B.C.).
73. Details from an incised *buccheri* vase (about 625-600 B.C.).
74. Bas-relief decoration on a gravestone of the sixth or fifth century B.C.

went somewhat out of fashion, in favour of embossed work and engraving. Ear-rings, brooches, chains and rings became more delicate and less massive. From the fifth century B.C. there are dainty necklaces of braided gold with numerous little pendants in the form of tiny heads, palm-leaves, lotus-blossoms and so on. Coloured beads (chiefly dark mauve) and brilliant enamel paint enhance the effect of the jewellery. The art of stone-cutting was also practised with outstanding skill by the Etruscans, who were particularly fond of scarabs in the Egyptian style. In the period of the Etruscans' artistic decline their jewellery became again over-lavish and extravagant, as it had been earlier in the seventh century, but now it was also of much coarser workmanship. For instance, a necklace of this date has seven gold-leaf medallions of unwieldy size hanging from it, depicting mythological scenes in embossed work. In the same way the *bulla*, a gold ball or locket worn by Etruscan boys as an amulet, came to reach gigantic dimensions. After that, the third century brought Etruscan goldsmith's work to an end as an independent art.

Only in one sphere of applied art did the Etruscans produce nothing above the level of mediocrity: this was in painted ceramics. The designs on Etruscan vases never achieved the wonderful precision and distinction of the Greek masterpieces, though their scenes from Greek mythology or representations of ritual or hunting have the same vitality and even wildness of rhythm that characterise the frescoes of their tombs. This, together with an intricate, exaggerated lavishness of ornament, is the special characteristic of Tyrrhenian vase-painting. The best works date from the fifth century B.C.: by the third century this branch of craftsmanship also becomes perceptibly decadent. In the late period there are only curious, ugly mixing-vessels in the form of human or demonic heads, and vessels made to imitate precious metals in gilded or silvered earthenware, of questionable taste. The Italian Baroque later produced the same sort of thing.

Of the domestic festivities and ceremonies of the Etruscans we

know little. There is no tradition preserved to show, for instance, how the birth of a child was celebrated. Only on the ritual of adoption is some evidence provided by a bronze mirror which depicts the adoption of Heracles by Juno, the hero being nursed against the breast of the goddess in a symbolic gesture. A cinerary urn from Clusium has a relief portraying a festival which has been identified as a wedding ceremony: the bridal pair are shown moving forward hand in hand under a canopy which covers their heads. The only ritual about which we have abundant evidence is that of the funeral, from the monuments to the dead. The sacramental solemnity and melancholy of this ceremony is mitigated, at least in the archaic period, by the comforting conception of the future life of the dead in their attractively furnished home beneath the earth.

The funeral rites began with the closing of the eyes of the departed by his nearest kinswoman. Then the body was put on the bier, splendidly clothed and scented, with the feet pointing towards the outer door of the *atrium*, which was adorned with branches and garlands. Next followed the lamentation.

In early times the burial was carried out at night, by torch-light. A solemn procession conducted the dead to their last home. In front went the musicians, then followed the women mourners and relations and friends in general. Servants, men and women, carried the funeral gifts and the appurtenances of the tomb: the bed, the throne, the canopy, the table and trolley for the food; and in the case of a dead man, there went the war-chariot and shield and weapons as well.

If the corpse was to be cremated, a pile of wood was built up near the tomb, on which the dead man was laid along with his favourite possessions, often including his chariot and horses. Then his relatives and friends lit the pyre with averted eyes. When the sombre spectacle of the cremation was over, the last embers were extinguished with water and wine, and one last sorrowing farewell was addressed to the dead man. Then his closest relatives collected the ashes in an urn and placed it in the tomb.

If the dead man had chosen the ceremony of burial he was laid out

on his own bed (which was brought along for the purpose) or on the stone couch already prepared in the tomb; sometimes, too, he was placed in a sarcophagus. He was wrapped in a purple shroud and often wore the gilded coronet of the dead, made of laurel or ivy leaves. If the mausoleum had a spacious *atrium*, the funeral feast with its dances and games in honour of the dead was held in the tomb itself. The dead man was treated as if he were present: so at least the archaic representations always show him, cheerfully sitting at the table in the midst of his loved ones.

The Tyrrhenians' way of life perhaps never reached the level of the Greeks, whom they so much admired. But they surpassed even the Greeks in the spheres of religion and of human love; for here their freshness and vitality had strong roots in their native earth, which enabled them to survive the disappearance of the Etruscans as a nation on Tyrrhenian soil and to burst into flame again at the Renaissance. Greek soil was denied such an opportunity of fresh life at a later date: after the first unparalleled upsurge of antiquity, it was left to remain nothing but a grand and tragic expanse of ruins, the relics of an irretrievably vanished past.

Chapter Fourteen

THE SACRED HILL OF ORVIETO

ORVIETO's crag rests like a heavy crown on the tranquil features of the landscape. Its almost vertical wall of tufa-stone is the colour of dull red gold, and the slender, glittering façade of its cathedral, rising above the brown mass of houses, is like the central jewel on some royal brow. The green countryside round about, with its wooded hills and its coloured vine-clad slopes and its translucent streams, seems almost overcome by this miracle resting on its crest.

It is the sort of place that Nature must have created as a symbol; a place where history must needs be made, spiritual forces burst loose, mortal conflicts be fought to a finish. There is no other spot in Etruria more plainly fitted to house the national sanctuary of a race than this rocky hill jutting out so conspicuously at the very heart of the realm. On the same site where the cathedral's radiant symbol shines forth today there once stood the brilliantly coloured wooden temples of the god Veltha or Voltumna and Nortia, the goddess of destiny. Here perhaps there once assembled year by year the leaders of the Etruscan city-states to take counsel and decide the future of the realm, to renew and reinforce year after year the nation's unity in common service to the gods. An important market where the products of the entire kingdom were for sale, as well as competitions in sport and art, in games and popular amusements of all kinds, must have made these days outstanding among the festivals of the Tyrrhenian year. It was no accident that the national god Voltumna (whose legendary portrait was later carried off to Rome after the destruction of Volsinium, to be set up there in the *Vicus Tuscus* as a

symbol of the Romans' victory) was a god of the seasons, of agriculture and the vineyard, a god of fertility whose festival fell in the month of March, when the young corn sprouted and the vine was in leaf. From the beginning the Tyrrhenians were tillers of the fields as well as seafarers. Until their appearance Italian agriculture was extremely primitive, and there was no question of planned or systematic cultivation of the ground. To the Etruscans undoubtedly belongs the credit of transforming the soil of Central Italy and Campania, which was marshy but not infertile, into a flourishing plough-land.

From the upper valleys of the Arno and the Chiana came a particularly fine species of wheat, the pure white *tuscum semen*, from which the Romans too made their oldest national dish, known as "pulse." The neighbourhood of Pisa also produced exceptionally fine wheat, and rye and millet were cultivated in the valley of the Arno. Pliny recommended bread made from a mixture of the white flour from Pisa and the red flour from Campania, as the best in Italy. The cultivation of oil and wine also flourished in Etruria. Ancient tradition mentions Volsinium as the leading centre of oil-production. Three kinds of grapes, cultivated in three different areas of Etruria, were particularly prized. In Tyrrhenian times Tuscany may well have presented essentially the same prosperous and fertile appearance as today, with its well-planned fields and its rich vineyards and olive groves; but in the meantime the climate of the areas once cultivated by the Etruscans has probably changed considerably. The proud forests, whose gigantic trees are described by Varro, have fallen long since; and with them has vanished the uniform humidity of the rainfall, winter and summer alike, which gave the soil such abundant fertility. Even the Etruscan *aquilices*, the guild of water-diviners (who presumably used hazel-rods), would no longer be able to conjure a drop of water out of the hard, parched soil of southern Tuscany.

The tradition of the great national festival at Volsinium, with its religious, political and economic significance, survived long after the destruction of the city, and even after the disappearance of the

Etruscans as a people. Under Constantine the Great priests were still chosen every year to conduct the ceremonies in honour of Voltumna at Volsinium, in which the whole population of Etruria took part; but by that date, of course, the new town founded by the Romans was meant.

The history of Orvieto is as obscure as that of the Etruscan race. Attempts have been made to derive the name of the town from the Tyrrhenian words *burt vi Veltba*, meaning something like "place of Veltha"; and also from *urbs vetus* ("ancient city"), the assumption being that the "ancient city" might refer to the age-old ruins of Volsinium. The identity of Orvieto and Volsinium is attested, among other evidence, by the fact that there is a gap of more than 200 years between the latest Etruscan finds on this site, which go down to the third century B.C., and the earliest traces of a new Roman settlement on the plateau of Orvieto. This interval accords exactly with Roman accounts of the fate of Volsinium. During those two centuries it is perfectly possible that the desolate rock with its ruins might have become gradually transformed, in the eyes of the defeated Etruscan people, from a symbol of a powerful kingdom into a token of its downfall—a gigantic monument to its vanished greatness.

There was to be no relief for the sacred hill of the Tyrrhenians from the double burden of political and spiritual conflict. Round the rocky foundations of gleaming gold on which it stands there flared up once more, by a strange repetition of fate, yet another mortal struggle at the beginning of the Middle Ages. But this time it was the dying Roman world defending itself against the irresistible irruption of the tribes from the north. Orvieto then became one of the most important strong-points of the Goths, who were besieged here by Belisarius. Later it was the Lombard Agilulf who held the countryside under control from his position on these heights. Finally the Church extended its grip to the much-contested prize. In the later Middle Ages again it was the scene of bloody struggles that raged between the papacy and the aristocracy, the Guelfs and the Ghibellines. For another century the scanty soil that covered its red

rock was fertilised by the blood and flame of religious and political vendettas.

Towards the end of the thirteenth century Pope Nicholas IV dedicated the first stone of Orvieto's cathedral on the summit of the hill, to glorify for all ages the mystical transformation of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ. He had it built on the very spot where once an Etruscan temple had stood; and so from the roots of the age-old sanctuary, dedicated to vanished gods, there grew up the miraculous edifice of a new House of God. Once more the rock bore on it a symbol of the power and greatness of the Italian people, in the incomparable masterpiece of the cathedral.

In lonely majesty the cathedral stands out on its rugged promontory, brooding over the lovely, tranquil countryside below. Not a single house in Orvieto has presumed to rest against the cathedral's sides, so that it stands detached on all sides in the same aloofness which must once have surrounded the sanctuary of the Tyrrhenian god, from whose consecrated precincts the houses of the dead were debarred.

The building of this House of God took three hundred years. Out of the original simplicity of the Romanesque style in which the church was begun by Maitani of Siena, there later flowered the ethereal splendour of a Gothic façade, soaring to heaven in three flame-like tongues. The velvety glow of its yellow marble combines with the brilliance of its mosaics in a blazing symphony of gold. The wealth of portraits, figures and shapes that adorns the beautifully proportioned surfaces of this façade gives it the brilliance of a jewelled setting without destroying the massive strength of its lines.

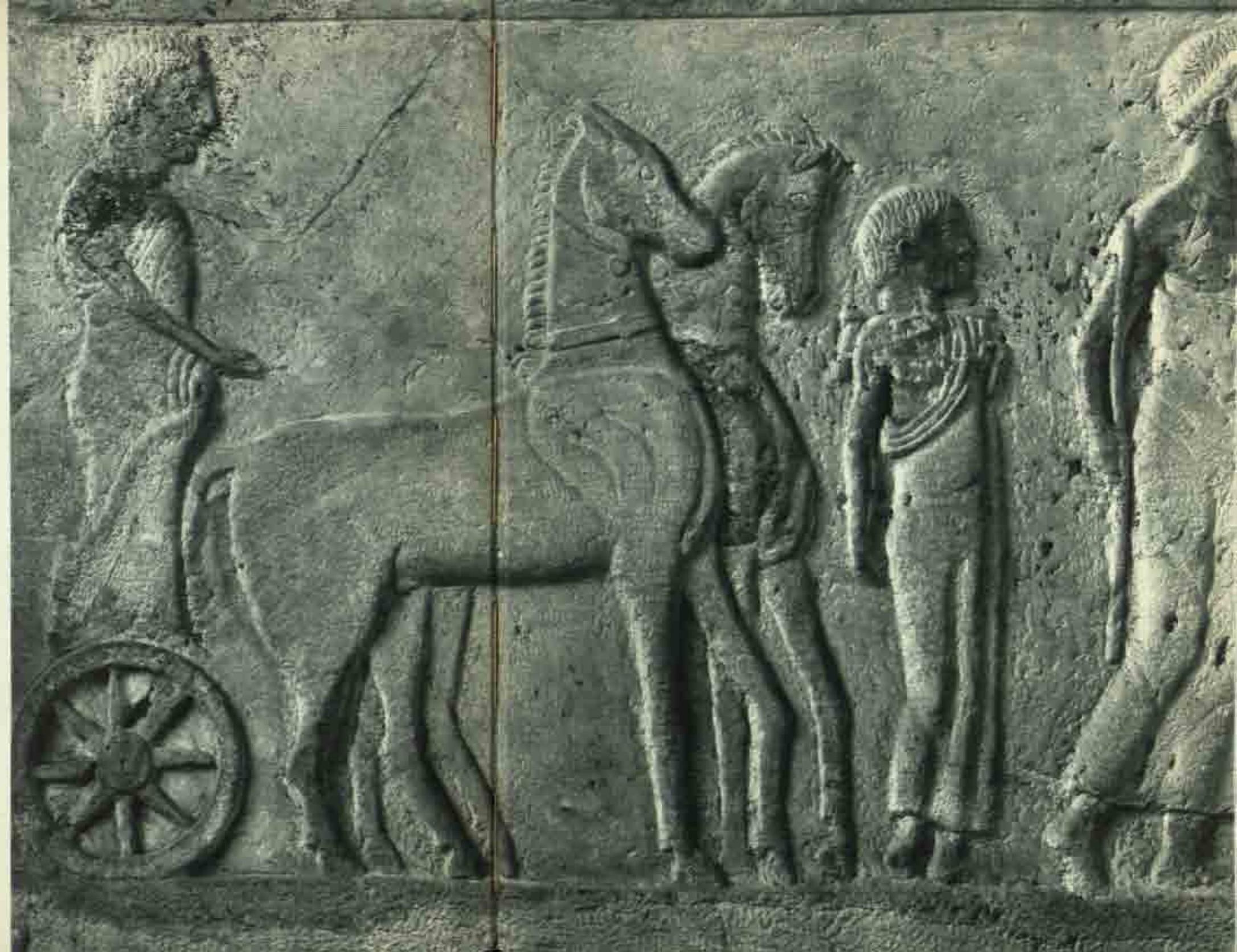
The interior of the cathedral retains the superb simplicity of a Romanesque basilica, not to be concealed by the wealth of architectural detail and reconstruction of later periods. The impression of extraordinary depth which this House of God gives is accentuated by the slight incline of the floor upwards towards the apse, with a corresponding lowering of the capitals on the two monumental rows of pillars flanking the central aisle. Fine-veined panes of onyx and

75. The sacrifice of Polyxena: bas-relief on a sarcophagus from Tarquinia (fourth century B.C.).
76. The *Porta all'Arco* at Volterra.
77. Sarcophagus of coloured marble from the necropolis of Caere.















windows of stained glass dim the sunlight falling on them to a delicate mist, which veils the apse and its harsh Gothic frescoes so that they seem to recede into the background.

Generations of artists worked on the decoration of Orvieto's cathedral. Almost all of them descended from the land that was once Etruria, from its soil honeycombed with the Tyrrhenian cities of the dead; and always through the centuries it bestowed on its children the continuing spiritual heritage of the Etruscans—their thirst for beauty, and the savage power of their imagination, and their bold flights of speculative originality. In the sombre vision of hell represented in the reliefs of the cathedral façade there still lurks the late Etruscans' fear of the other world; and as visible evidence of the survival of Etruscan ideology, the Devil here bears the lineaments of an Etruscan demon: it is curious that the mask of just such a demon has been dug up in this very place. In the picture of the Last Judgment by Luca Signorelli in a side-chapel of the cathedral, we can see through the macabre notions of hellish torture a background of that same old pagan worship of life which had once been to the Tyrrhenians the obverse of their placid resignation to death. So here, after a thousand years of repression, the apotheosis of earthly beauty and the worship of the human form attained their destiny of a second birth.

The downfall of the damned, depicted on the walls of the cathedral with a masterly brush by an artist unsurpassed until Michelangelo, is like the overthrow of the ancient gods, still proud and terrible in their defeat at the hands of an even greater God. The ancient world possessed a superb, naked power to glorify the eternal forces of life; and it can be seen again here in the stream of struggling bodies, twisting and turning in their descent into the open jaws of hell with all its demons. And the rose-crowned, unveiled saints of Luca Signorelli seem to be winging their way not to a celestial heaven of refuge from all things earthly, but rather to the delights of an Elysian banquet, such as the Etruscans loved to represent on the walls of their habitations of the dead.

- 78 and 79. Funeral procession: details of the bas-relief decoration on the marble sarcophagus shown in Plate 77.
80. The Vase of Vix (late sixth century B.C.). Possibly of Greek origin: it recalls certain figured vases in Etruscan tombs, such as the "Tomb of the Lionesses" at Tarquinia.
81. Detail of the Gorgon's head on the handle of the Vase of Vix.

A new God is now enthroned on the sacred hill of the Tyrrhenians. The glory of his splendid house has long since quenched the last memory of the squat temple and the enigmatic smiles of the images set up by a vanished people to their gods, who ruled here thousands of years ago. Today the only indications of the ancient shrines are coloured fragments of terracotta and grinning faces of demons, or ornamental friezes and earthenware heads of grave-eyed deities and *genii*.

Of the Etruscan town nothing remains except, as at Clusium, a labyrinth of subterranean passages. But the foot of the rock of Orvieto is entirely encircled by a necropolis in the form of a ring, which has only been partially excavated up to now; and even the wooded slopes of the surrounding hills contain the tombs of leading Etruscans. So after visiting the golden miracle of the cathedral one can descend from its living glory into the twilight world of the dead. It is pleasant to stroll through the shadowy alleys of the ancient town, so still it seems, as if listening in a dream to the weary heart-beat of the centuries, throbbing slow and faint within. The weather-beaten mediaeval houses have their windows and balconies splashed bright red with geraniums and carnations. The people of Orvieto are taciturn but friendly.

Massive walls of tufa-blocks encircle the town, which was first built in the Middle Ages. The Tyrrhenians flung no circuit of cyclopean walls round the rock of Orvieto, which is further evidence that a sanctuary stood here, dedicated to a god so powerful in the eyes of the Etruscans that his temple stood in no need of human protection. To rest for ever in its consecrated shadows seemed to devout Etruscans a promise so full of comfort that a city of the dead grew up round its base and enfolded the hill in its gentle embrace.

All external traces of the necropolis have been obliterated by landslides, or by water, or by the destructive hand of man. But the earth is still pregnant with its treasures. Quantities of funerary gifts, earthenware and bronze, are continually restored to the light of day, mostly by the ploughs of peasants in the fields. There was a time,

before state control was properly exercised over archaeological finds on Italian soil, when a veritable black market in antiquities took place here, and objects of great value were exported for trivial sums.

The only systematic excavations so far undertaken have been at the so-called "tufa-cross," where a group of chamber-tombs has been discovered, each consisting of one cell, planned with perfect uni-



15. *Ruins of a temple near Orvieto*

formity and made of square-cut blocks of stone. Each one of these tombs has the name of its dead occupant carved above the entrance. The identical layout in each case gives something of the impression of a monastic order, burying its members here in conformity with some unvarying regulation. Perhaps this is where the priestly servants of the shrine of Voltumna found their last rest. (Plates 68 and 69.)

The finest of the habitations of the dead lie on the further slope of the valley-basin from which the hill of Orvieto protrudes like an island. The ancient Roman road leads up the slope alongside a twelfth-century aqueduct, sweeping out in huge curves. In a thicket of oak trees bordering the road a painted earthenware sarcophagus was found once after a storm, beneath a tree that the lightning had uprooted: it now stands in the museum of Orvieto, almost undamaged. It is covered on all four sides with masterly scenes in relief, which still have an astonishing vitality, thanks to the excellent preservation of the painting in red, blue and yellow. Here again we find

representations of Greek mythology in the Etruscan style. One scene is the sacrifice of Polyxena, attended by sinister demons ringed with snakes; another shows the winged Furies, with torches in their hands and merciless expressions on their faces, awaiting the souls of the Trojans sacrificed by Achilles to Patroclus. The same macabre, heroic manner that characterises the frescoes of the François Tomb can be seen again in these gruesome scenes overshadowed by the idea of death, which probably date from the turn of the fourth to the third century B.C.

This sarcophagus was no doubt part of a tomb that has been destroyed; and not far from the place where it was found is the tomb of the Velia family. Its long, narrow entrance opens out in the middle of the rich red soil of a steeply inclined field. A hundred years ago, when the discoverer of the tomb first found his way in, the single chamber was still decorated with magnificent wall-paintings. Since them, however, human stupidity has been responsible for irreparable damage, by leaving this treasure exposed year after year. Today there is preserved only a small portion of the solemn banquet in the underworld which the artist painted round the walls. Fortunately there are at least traces of the original condition of the wall-paintings. The divine pair of the underworld sitting on their thrones can hardly be recognised any longer; nor can the members of the Velia family on their purple couches, sitting at the banquet while graceful figures of naked boys move among them to serve the guests. Only the splendid scene of the preparation of the banquet is still partially preserved on the damp walls, where young men can be distinguished making music to lighten the labours of the cooks, and at least a guess can be made at the superlative beauty of this fourth-century painting.

The same hillside contains two other habitations of the dead, in one of which are preserved two fine paintings to the left and right of the entrance. Each shows a pair of horses, driven respectively by a young man and by a *baruspex*. The wild grace of their limbs as they charge forwards, and the tense lines of the animals' small heads, are

evidence of the skill of the Etruscan painter who fixed them on this wall.

Perhaps many such habitations of the dead still sleep undiscovered beneath the fertile soil and the stout roots of the oaks and chestnuts: all of them turning their gaze towards the sacred hill of the Etruscan people, which still rises out of the vale of the dead like a golden island of immortality.

Chapter Fifteen

VELATHRI AND ITS HARBOUR

VELATHRI (Volaterrae) stands on a height dominating the coastal plain from a great distance. It was the outermost bastion of the Etruscan world on the west. At the same time it developed an important mission for colonising in a northward direction, where it founded Arezzo and Fiesole and perhaps also Cortona. The role of bulwark against the pressure of the predatory Ligurians also fell to Velathri. The strength of this Etruscan border-town is testified to this day by its colossal cyclopean walls, over five miles long and varying in thickness between ten and seventeen feet. Sulla once had to mount a siege lasting two years against the town before he compelled it to surrender; and then it was not to armed force but to starvation.

In the time of the Tyrrhenians the horizon of Velathri was ringed with smoking volcanoes. Today their craters are long since cold, but the whole area still steams from subterranean furnaces. Sulphur springs and hot vapours break out of the earth at many places; and at Larderello huge columns of steam (*soffioni*) shoot out of the earth, which is scorched white by some chemical substance, and mount up to the heavens with a shrill hissing noise. There is an incinerated appearance about the soil all round Volterra, as though it had slowly been reduced to ashes by the smouldering fire within. Broad expanses of bare soil of a whitish clay succeed each other everywhere between the fields and olive-groves in the valleys of the rivers Cecina and Era, which surround the *massif* of Volterra. In some places the flanks of the rocky summit rise vertically out of the valley, bare and lifeless and

violet-grey in colour. Above them sits in lonely majesty the "city of silence," as D'Annunzio called Volterra; and the city itself seems from a distance as if it were built of ash and lava, mute and lifeless and extinct.

Nearly three thousand years ago Velathri and Vatluna, which lay on the sea, were the two chief industrial centres of the mining area of Tuscany. To the prolific production of copper, iron, lead and silver from this area was added the iron production of Elba, which entered this traffic *via* the harbour of Pupluna, below Velathri. It was therefore primarily in this area that there began in the eighth century B.C. (perhaps even earlier) that rapid economic advancement of the Tyrrhenians which laid the foundations of their brilliant cultural development.

Etruscan pre-eminence in the practice of mining was universally recognised in the ancient world, even though the Etruscans' methods of extracting the metal seem absurd to modern ideas. In the state of technical development at that date, mining must naturally have been confined to strata near the surface; and where the metalliferous ore could not be extracted with the pickaxe, recourse was had to fire. The process of smelting was conducted, on the evidence of many discoveries in the neighbourhood of Vetulonia, Volterra and Populonia, in primitive little ovens, which cannot have extracted full value. Nevertheless, the extent of the Etruscans' mining industry reached astonishing proportions, as is still to be seen today from the widespread distribution of kilns over the whole mineral area and the numerous skilfully planned tunnels into the hills of the Tuscan coast.

Velathri was thus the mistress of a fertile territory rich in mineral wealth; it was also marshy, but apparently not yet subject to the endemic plague of malaria which was later to play so great a part in the decline of the coastal Tyrrhenian cities. The city covered a much greater area in the period of its prime than modern Volterra, which has not even expanded beyond the circuit of walls, barely a mile in circumference, erected in the Middle Ages round the diminished city. The Etruscan town which grew up in the eighth century on the site

of an Italian settlement numbered a population of some 25,000 souls—more than three times the population of today.

Above the narrow streets of Volterra, flanked by houses and palaces centuries old, there towers oppressively the massive citadel built at the end of the Middle Ages on the foundations of the former Etruscan acropolis. Its circuit corresponds approximately to that of the Tyrrhenian fortress. The mediaeval citadel consists of two complexes of buildings, surrounded by immense bastions and circular towers, and connected to each other by an extensive courtyard. This solid block of massive fortifications served originally as a dungeon, where many a political conspirator celebrated in the bloodstained annals of history ended his life in the notorious round cells of the Mastio, the principal tower of the fortress. More than a century ago the old state dungeons were turned into a common criminal prison, a function which they still fulfil.

The gloomy sister-building to the Mastio, with its population of human outcasts, is the great bare edifice of the lunatic asylum of Volterra, which houses several hundred mental cases.

It is as if the town and its silent population were overshadowed and oppressed by all the sufferings of many generations of prisoners in these two places of confinement—the fortress and the lunatic asylum. Something of the atmosphere of a prison-yard still clings even to the magnificent main square of Volterra and to its lofty palaces sheathed in the local grey tufa-stone known as *panchina*. There is something menacing even about the austere beauty of the 700-year-old *Palazzo dei Priori*, with its narrow façade framed in spires and dominated by the slender column of its clock-tower; and it seems to impose an impenetrable silence on all the gay chatter of the little *piazza*.

Here and there within the circuit of the fortress can still be seen isolated blocks from the inner ring of the Tyrrhenian wall, which once protected the citadel. Often they are incorporated in mediaeval buildings. The outer wall encircling the whole plateau can still be recognised from a distance: time has damaged it, but nowhere is it

broken down. The past might and importance of Velathri need indeed no better witness than this wonderful construction, representing one of the oldest and at the same time one of the greatest works of fortification in the whole of Etruria. The cyclopean wall, which reaches fifty feet in height at many points, was begun in the second half of the sixth century and completed only some hundred years later: the mediaeval wall, which is only a mile in circumference, took about the same length of time. The great courses of jagged stones seem to have been quite carelessly thrown together, and only in a few places are they clamped with bronze braces; yet like some rock of ages they have bidden unshaken defiance to destruction.

Once there were ten gateways into the interior of the city, two of which have survived. The *Porta Diana* is no more than a gap in the walls, flanked by two columns of massive blocks placed one upon another. The *Porta all' Arco*, or "arched gate," however, still preserves its original construction substantially intact. The massive gateway is built of carefully squared blocks, three feet long. Probably in Tyrrhenian times it was flanked by towers on either side. It is more than twenty-five feet thick. In the Middle Ages the masonry was surfaced with small squared stones; but the gateway itself, with its two broad arches on either side built of yellowy-white Travertine stone, is purely Etruscan. On the outward arch of the *Porta all' Arco* are three huge heads of black tufa-stone, outstretched as if on the alert. The central one forms the keystone, and the other two form the bases of the arch to left and right. Their features are obliterated by time, but it can still be detected that they wore garlands on their brows. No doubt they were portraits of the tutelary deities (perhaps Jupiter and the Dioscuri) who were supposed to protect the entrance to the town. (Plate 76.)

The *Porta all' Arco* is the most ancient of all surviving Etruscan gateways. The *Porta Marzia* and the *Porta Augusta* at Perugia are of much more recent date, and therefore more gracefully built and richer in architectural detail. But even if these latter two gates are more beautiful than that of Volterra, neither of them is steeped to the same

degree in the primeval mystery of the *Porta all' Arco*. To enter the town under its low arch, listening to the hollow echo of one's feet, is a curious, magical and thrilling experience.

The *Porta all' Arco* belongs to that part of the Etruscan wall which was incorporated in the new wall of the reduced mediaeval town. There still remain, however, large sections of the old wall (which enclosed an area of fifty acres) jutting out in isolation in the middle of deserted meadows, where grow the delicate cloudy-grey olive trees and the slender cypresses. They look like the last surviving rocks of an island swallowed up in the ocean.

But it is not only the Etruscan city that has vanished: a large part of its necropolis has also disappeared for ever from the hill of Volterra. In its interior there was a constant stir of movement, day and night, of destructive life within. The soil slipped and crumbled away unceasingly, and dangerous fissures continually opened up in the outer surface, and great landslides of clay soil broke off to tumble into the valley. More than two hundred years ago a gigantic fragment of the undermined summit broke away in a single night and crashed into the abyss with an apocalyptic roar and thunder. Together with the collapsing cliff of clay and rock, the gorge swallowed up a mediaeval abbey that had stood on the edge of the plateau, and probably also the bones and ashes and treasures of many dead Etruscans of the archaic period, whose tombs must have lain just at this spot, to judge by the evidence of various finds.

The gash inflicted on the hill by the forces beneath the earth was never to be healed. Cleft open at this spot, which is called *le balze*, the bosom of the hillside is like a sore that is always freshly bleeding. In the twilight, when a blue mist rises from the folds of the hills enclosing the royal eminence of Volterra in a wide ring and the sky turns a watery green above the sharp contours of Monte Amiata, there is an unearthly, sinister beauty about the *balze* which seems not of this world. The pale, gashed surfaces of the vertical cliff gleam with a phosphorescent shimmer of decay; and the grey and violet masses of clay that fell in avalanches centuries ago lie now like

emanations of the underworld, suddenly frozen in their ghostly course, in the murky recesses of the vapour-filled ravine.

Not long ago a minor landslide revealed the broken vault of an Etruscan tomb. An array of undamaged black and red earthenware vases gleamed out of the darkness of this habitation of the dead. Their presence here corroborated the theory that a necropolis lay buried beneath the avalanche of the *balze*.

Although this particular city of the dead, no doubt the most important of the three situated round Velathri, has been destroyed by the collapse of the hillside, nevertheless there are numerous tombs to be found outside the various gateways of the town, most of them dating from the late Etruscan period. Many of these are spacious vaults supported on central pillars, containing a great mass of alabaster urns decorated in relief, with representations of the dead on their lids. One of them is the tomb of the powerful family of Ceicna (in Latin, Caecina), which must have long dominated Volterra: it played an important rôle even in the time of Cicero, who speaks of his close friends, Aulus Caecina and his sons, as the most learned and aristocratic family in Etruria. This tomb alone contains fifteen such urns. During the sixth century B.C. the old clumsy cinerary vessels of tufa or terracotta were already being replaced by the carvers of Velathri with such urns of alabaster, generally brightly painted and sometimes even gilded.

The inhabitants of this neighbourhood have retained to this day the gift for imparting artistic shapes to the soft translucent stone that is to be found in such quantities round Volterra. Many of the narrow alleys of the town, steep and rocky as river-beds, are white with dust, which lies like snow-flakes in front of certain houses. These are where the alabaster-carvers have their workshops and practise their craft, just as it was practised thousands of years ago, except that it is no longer dedicated to the service of the dead. Today the superb stone with its endless variety of iridescent colours, from a translucent white or the yellow of honey to grey, green and brown, is worked into vases, hanging lamps, lanterns, statues and innumerable other

articles of exquisite taste. And the fingers of these *artigiani* of Volterra are still as skilful and conscientious as in days gone by, when they used to chisel the delicate contours of a funerary relief or model the head of a dead Tyrrhenian with lifelike expressiveness.

Nowhere else in Etruria was the art of high relief so carefully and skilfully practised in the late period as it was here in Velathri. Although the Etruscans' strong taste for relief goes back to a very early date, it was originally a sharply outlined low relief that they adopted for their gravestones and other mortuary monuments. There are many examples of this at Tarquinia and Chiusi; and in the vicinity of Volterra, again, a gravestone of the seventh century has been found (now preserved in the town museum) which depicts an armed warrior with a circular helmet and a broad sword, with an inscription round the figure reading: *mi laribi atharnies—uxulni mulueuneche* ("I—the gravestone—belong to Larth Atharnie—Uxulni set me up"). The workmanship of the figure is somewhat coarse and summary: in contrast with the bronze-work of the same date, which was already highly skilled, this stone carving gives quite a primitive effect. The same technique is employed in representations in relief from Tarquinia of animated groups or single creatures of legend, belonging to the same date. On the other hand, Etruscan low reliefs on earthenware and stone of about the middle of the sixth century B.C. already show exceptional quality. The same scenes of dancing and fighting which appear on archaic wall-paintings are now used to decorate sarcophagi and urns in relief; and their arrangement of figures shows a skilful feeling for space and decorative effect. The vitality of the banquet-scenes is often astonishing in contrast to the formality of the archaic style: the violent, almost orgiastic rhythm is typically Tyrrhenian, while Greek influence can be seen in the refinement of their outlines and the delicate elegance of their treatment of drapery.

However, the art of relief only found its truest expression with the Tyrrhenians in their late period, when low relief had been replaced by high. A revolutionary break with the spatial laws that had pre-

vailed so far in antiquity is particularly to be seen in the battle-scenes decorating sarcophagi and cinerary urns after the fourth century B.C. There is no longer any attempt at arrangement in depth, and the attempt to solve spatial problems is finally abandoned in favour of intricate ornamentation. The final rejection of spatial concepts, together with the emergence into the open of the Etruscans' deep-seated pleasure in mere decoration, constitutes an artistic development that was to be of the greatest importance for the West. The same impulses that here found their first expression were to have a fresh creative effect in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, with the comprehension and mastery of spatial infinity.

The representations of battles between Centaurs and Lapiths, Etruscans and Gauls, and especially the violently animated scenes on the urns of Volterra, demonstrably had an influence in the thirteenth century on Nicola Pisano, who revived Italian plastic art and worked for many years at Volterra. In his reliefs, after many centuries, the stiff formality of mediaeval forms began to dissolve, and in the proportions of his single panels and their setting, and in the hang of the clothes, the movement of the figures and above all of the horses, there are innumerable echoes of the alabaster reliefs on Etruscan cinerary urns. Others who studied and admired the urns of Volterra were Jacopo della Quercia and Michelangelo, whose relief of the Battle of the Titans may well have been directly inspired by them. At that date, according to the *Description of Italy* by Leandro Alberti in the sixteenth century, they were used to decorate all the streets and palaces and gardens of Volterra.

The Middle Ages regarded works of art belonging to the pagan past with a certain superstitious awe and aversion, hardly daring to put them to any profane use in their own daily lives; but at the Renaissance people sought to immerse their world again in the newly recognised splendour of ancient art. In Tuscany more than anywhere else there grew up a passionate interest in the secrets and treasures of the past, which the soil of Italy contained in inexhaustible quantity. Many of the great feudal princes were amateur

archaeologists and thereby contributed not a little to the rediscovery of Etruscan civilisation. The fruits of the excavations undertaken at their behest were then used to decorate their palaces and country villas. Many Etruscan sarcophagi, with half-reclining figures of the dead on their lids, are still to be seen standing in the derelict parks of Baroque country-houses round about the towns of Tuscany. Weather-beaten lions which once stood guard over Etruscan tombs today often protect the gateways of old, dilapidated palaces. Small cinerary coffers are not infrequently built into the walls. At Montepulciano, near Chiusi, thanks to a bizarre whim of the builder, the whole foundation of the fifteenth-century Buccelli palace consists of nothing but urns carved in relief, which were filled with cement and then used as blocks.

The urns that were formerly used to decorate the town of Volterra have now all found shelter in the spacious museum. The scenes on many of these cinerary containers are of exceptional interest for their themes. On some of them, for instance, are pictures of monumental tombs with a superstructure of squared blocks above the ground, topped by a pyramid or an obtuse cone. One of the urns shows a walled town behind a gateway on which there are three heads, like the *Porta all' Arco*. It can safely be assumed that this is certainly a Tyrrhenian town, if not Velathri itself. On other cinerary containers there are shown moving scenes of farewell between the dead, who are being led away by Charu brandishing his hammer or by the *genii* of death, and their relatives left behind. The heads of the dead lying on the urns are often life-size, and generally of superlative workmanship and expressive vitality; but the bodies are almost always made disproportionately small.

The tombs of Velathri have also yielded valuable material for scholars to study the Etruscan language. In addition to the numerous tomb-stones and cinerary vessels (most of the inscriptions on which are confined to short names and degrees of relationship), there is also a lead plaque found in a mausoleum with seventy-nine words on it, including the names of many leading Etruscan families of Velathri,

and a marble cube with twenty-two words. This text is of exceptional importance for scholarship, since it appears not to be a funerary inscription. Like all examples of Tyrrhenian writing, it has unleashed storms of controversy in the world of learning over its interpretation. It has been explained as an undertaker's bill, as a memorial, and as having some agricultural significance. It is evident that the riddle of this cube has as little chance of being elucidated as the much-disputed Etruscan die from Magliano, which has a number written out alphabetically on each of its six sides. Even here it has not been possible to identify with certainty the numbers from one to six in these six words. It seems that in their early days the Tyrrhenians did not make very frequent use of their script, except for religious purposes. They certainly knew the Greek alphabet of twenty-six letters as early as the eighth century B.C.; this is clear from an ivory tablet dug up at Vetulonia. This alphabet was adapted by them to the special forms and phonetics of their own language, by eliminating those sounds which were not used in Etruscan, such as b, d, x, s and o (which was replaced by u), and introducing special combinations, such as vh for f. Later they invented a special sign for the f-sound, which resembled an 8. The Tyrrhenian language of the archaic period sounds strange but not unpleasant. There is a dedicatory inscription on an earthenware vase, reading: *aska mi eleivana—mini mulvanike mamarce velchanas*, which means: "I am an oil-jar dedicated by Mamarce Velchana." It is as melodious as a line of poetry, and even the names sound soft and beautiful—Tulumne, Papathna, Seianti, Apaiatru, Luvisui. After the fifth century B.C. the Tyrrhenians spoke and wrote the new Etruscan, which was distinguished from the archaic language chiefly by a greater regularity of grammatical forms and terminations, by a frequent omission of the vowels, and as a result by a changed, harsher and somewhat sibilatory pronunciation, together with a tendency to aspirate the consonants. The peculiar aspirated 'c' of Tuscan Italian is in all probability a relic of the Etruscan pronunciation. A line from the text of the mummy-wrapping from Agram reads:

A	a	Y	n
B	(f)	田	(s?)
C	c (=k)	O	(o)
D	(d)	Γ	p,
Ξ	e	Ω	s
Φ	o	φ	z
I	x	Σ	t
Θ	h	Τ	u
Ω	θ (=th)	Υ	i
Ι	ι	X	ɔ
Κ	k	Φ	(=ph)
Λ	l	Ψ	(=ch)
Μ	m	Ω	f

16. *The Etruscan alphabet*

*... ecn zeri lecin in-c zee fler thezince sacnicstres
cilths spurestres enas ethrse tinsi tiurim avils chis . . .*

which gives a clear conception of the changed character of the language's sound.

The conversion of Greek names into Etruscan, which can most conveniently be traced in the names of deities incised on the bronze mirrors, has made possible a fairly exact appreciation of the Etruscan pronunciation. It was pointed out in the first chapter that there is a fundamental difference between the Etruscan language and the idioms of Latin and Umbrian. The roots and terminations of Etruscan show no common features with those of the Italian dialects. The few Indo-European intrusions into the Tyrrhenian grammar are doubtless of late date, and can be attributed to the intermingling of the Etruscans with Italian elements.

The argument from language is one of the most important links in the chain of evidence against an indigenous origin of the Tyrrhenians. The relics of the Ligurian language to be found in place-names, and the legible but incomprehensible monumental records of the Piceni (that other inexplicable tribal stock to be found on Italian soil, probably the remnant of an ancient Mediterranean people) both point to the cultural group which once embraced the whole of the prehistoric western Mediterranean world, including southern France, Ireland, Spain, the Balearic Islands, Malta, Sardinia, parts of the southern Italian coast, and ancient Sicily. The few roots in these which are connected with Etruscan are also to be found all over the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean—for instance, in Lydian and among the pre-Indo-European geographical designations in Greece. However, there is a complete absence in central Italy of place-names containing the ss suffix, which is characteristic of the oldest stage in the original Aegean language and which would certainly be found here if an Aegean race of the prehistoric period had been originally settled here. This is further evidence that the Tyrrhenians arrived on Italian soil at a comparatively late date, with an already highly developed language of their own.

There are a number of very striking phonetic affinities between the Etruscan language and those of prehistoric America. Place-names like Thezle (a town once situated in the neighbourhood of Volterra) and names of gods, demons and people, such as Vatmi (the guardian deity of Vatluna), Tuchulcha, Tanaquil, Tequna and others, are astonishingly reminiscent of ancient American names. Even the typically Mexican Aztec root *rumach* also occurs in Etruscan, and indeed in the very name of Rome. These similarities of sound, together with certain architectural affinities between the pyramid-temples of Mexico or Peru, with their obtuse conical structures on top, and the monumental tombs of Etruria, have given rise to boldly speculative attempts at linking the Tyrrhenians by way of the legendary Atlantis with the ancient culture of America. Even Plato can be cited in evidence to this end, since he records the inhabitants of Atlantis as having reached as far as Asia by way of Africa, and having at one time occupied the Tyrrhenian coast. But it is not only the origin of the Tyrrhenians that is still heatedly disputed, but also the date of their appearance on Italian soil; and it is precisely in the mineral area where the economic advance of the Tyrrhenians first began that this question arises in its acutest form.

According to one expert theory which has much to be said for it, the first landing of the Etruscans on the Italian coast took place substantially earlier than was originally inferred from the development of their own culture, the clear evidence of which dates only from the eighth century B.C. Their landings would on this assumption have taken place in the eleventh-tenth century B.C. in the neighbourhood of Tarquinia and Caere and at the harbour of Pupluna, which was at that date probably under Sardinian occupation.

Pupluna, which once played such an important role in Etruscan history, has entirely disappeared more than 1500 years ago. Today there is nothing more than a fishing village in the almost circular bay into which the first Tyrrhenian ships made their way, perhaps 3000 years ago, and which later housed the industrial and commercial quarter with its dockyards and wharves and warehouses. The siege

and destruction of the town by Sulla in the year 80 B.C. was a blow from which this ancient mining centre was never able to recover. The loneliness of the derelict coast is now interrupted only by a few cottages, belonging to the castle built high up above the sea on the ridge skirting the harbour, where the citadel of Pupluna once stood.

The whole melancholy beauty of this coastal landscape hovers over the silent bay of Pupluna. Strong-scented *maccia* grows wild down the hillsides, encroaching on the soil which once supported vines so large that, according to Varro, a statue of Tinia could be carved out of their trunks. On the flat shore grow broad, velvety green pine trees, reflected in iridescent water. Far out from the shore, near the entrance to the bay, can be seen on the sea-bed, when the water is low and calm, the shadowy outline of a Tyrrhenian ship, sunk thousands of years ago. Inland, the ground is encrusted to a depth of several feet by rusty-red slag-heaps—the waste product of Etruscan and later of Roman kilns. They still show evidence of a mineral content so rich that an attempt to exploit them again was made in the First World War.

In the course of digging the mines, a number of dome-shaped tombs were found, which have since been dated by the Tyrolese pre-historian, Schachermeyer, to the eleventh century B.C. These remarkable monuments are generally round or elliptical in shape. Their walls are made of large, rough-hewn blocks, except when they are cut out of the solid rock. A crudely constructed dummy vault covers the interior, which is often divided into a number of cells. The whole structure was covered by a mound of earth. A particularly interesting feature is the projecting gutter in many of these monuments: carefully constructed of tiles, combined with a sloping stone paving round the whole building, its purpose was to drain away the rain-water. From the scanty range of funerary offerings found in these tombs, and especially from the so-called "discussifibulae" whose appearance in Italy is dated between the eleventh and eighth centuries, a very early date has been inferred for these

primitive mausoleums. At the same date came the introduction of pit-graves, in which perhaps the poorer people were buried.

It is beyond doubt that the dome-shaped tomb is the oldest form of monument devoted to the Etruscan dead. Like the later Tyrrhenian forms of burial, it shows many correspondences with the roughly contemporary habitations of the dead in Asia Minor. In their later evolution, in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., the imitation vaults of the Tyrrhenian dome-tombs attained a noteworthy technical skill: not only those erected in the coastal area but also those further inland. But they were never to achieve the beauty and precision of the monumental *tholos*-tombs of Mycenaean civilisation.

In the light of the primitive but fully developed form of the dome-tombs of Populonia, fresh importance must be attached to the legend of the Aeneid, which dates the Tyrrhenian settlement of Italy very early, as well as to the secular calendar of the Etruscans, which begins in the tenth century. On this evidence, the first Etruscans must have landed on the Umbrian coast not with the treasures of an advanced Aegean civilisation in their hands, but as a group of tribes driven before the storm of the Aegean migration, a sort of expeditionary corps from Asia Minor whose level of civilisation had, as a result of barbarian devastations, sunk as far as that of the Greek world after the fall of Mycenaean power. Only thus can we explain the absence of typically Tyrrhenian products among the funerary offerings in the oldest tombs of Populonia, whether of the pit or dome type. The Etruscans must then have had nothing fit to compete with Italian products, and therefore simply took them over as they were.

On this theory, the overwhelming majority of the Etruscan people must still have stayed behind in their native Asia Minor. Only when the revival of nearer Asia began, about the second half of the tenth century, must a new period of prosperity have begun for the Tyrrhenians in Asia Minor too, in the course of which they developed into a race of enterprising seafarers in rivalry with the Phoenicians. They must then have established strong-points on Lemnos, Lesbos

and perhaps also in Caria; and finally, about the year 800 B.C., they emigrated in full force to the land of promise with its abundant raw materials, where their advanced guard had already found a new home. This second and bigger wave of emigration must then have been the one that brought with it all those typical manifestations of Etruscan culture which began to appear on Italian soil at about this time. But the connection with the former mother country and the small part of the race that had stayed there must have been very close in the early period, as witness the development of tombs and of metallurgy in both Etruria and Asia Minor, which were in many respects similar. The further fortunes of the Tyrrhenians of Asia Minor may well be connected with the invasion of the Cimmerians, which destroyed the Ionian coastal states and the kingdom of Phrygia about the same date. Perhaps they too fell victims to this barbarian onslaught, together with their supposed capital, Tyrsa, during the seventh century that proved so tragic for Asia Minor.

Whatever there may be to be said for this interpretation of the fate of the Etruscans, it still remains no more than one theory among many—an exploratory probe into that darkness which shrouds the origin, the nature and the language of the Tyrrhenian race. It is equally possible that the Etruscans originally landed on the Umbrian coast as complete strangers, the last representatives of a world of culture whose time was spent, and that it was from their union with the soil of Italy that such a miraculous harvest was reaped. What they then brought with them to the virgin, fallow soil of Italy was their open-heartedness, their skill and delight in creation, their quality of a fertilising natural force. Their mission would then be one of stimulus rather than consummation; and their days were therefore numbered, and their fate was to be forgotten. Yet today, when the Etruscan tombs and ruins have yielded up the evidence of their greatness once more, when the fabric of the past has begun to become transparent, and the links of that mysterious chain which binds together today and yesterday and time long past are growing daily easier to trace back through the centuries, we are becoming con-

tinually clearer and clearer about the significance of the Tyrrhenians for the evolution of Italy, and with it of the West.

The Etruscans may have not a word to say to us; but the things that they did and made speak for them; and their spirit lives on imperishably in the land that houses their tombs for ever.

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